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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

MAY-JUNE, 1943

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PARTISAN REVIEW

VOLUME X, No. 3 MAY-JUNE, 1943

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The Mohammedans

H. J. Kaplan

IT NEVER OCCURRED to any of us that Simon might have been involved in the affair of the Mohammedans. He himself not only avoided any mention of the case, but shut himself up and saw no one until it was over. This indeed might have been construed as a suspicious circumstance, were it not for the fact that when we went to see Simon it was hardly in order to discuss the pitiful local scandals.

His full name was Charles Rodney Simon, and he had an illustrious ancestry among the local robber barons. He was small, middle-aged, very poor, shy, with a vehement, disjointed way of speaking. We were not disappointed to find him bizarre, with an inward irony and exquisite manners: it was just what we had been led to expect of a man who had lived abroad and seen T. S. Eliot plain. But think! A man could tell uproarious tales about his adventures as Lord of a Manor that was literally tumbling down about his ears. Ambassador of the Ideal in a town whose rapid development was due to the manufacture of fertilizer and the trading of hogs. He never breathed a word. . . . O, Simon, Simon, what a *soirée* you missed!

One evening, late in the summer of 1942, he was sitting alone at the front window of his ancestral mansion, watching the sun go down over the park. Oddly enough, he was thinking of Negroes. Though both streets within his range of vision shook from time to time with the monstrous rumbling of trucks, Simon cocked his ear to catch the faint, boisterous, confused sounds that drifted from the other side of the park. Over there, beyond the iron fence lined with clumps of trees and bushes, beyond the narrow strip of lawn, the streets of the Negro neighborhood glowed already with the garish neons, the bustling and back-slapping and ribald shouts. Simon often walked in that neighborhood, which only the park had prevented from engulfing his house. And he spoke often,

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with regret, of the Negroes, "creatures of music and dream," who formed a world apart in America. A world of joy and spirit, a City which one might have opposed, as Lorca had opposed his gypsies, to the real world in which they violently and tragically lived. Only they were too numerous and too contemporary, like most things in this country. . . . The dusk was coming down swiftly. For a moment, Simon was distracted by a tiny, two-seater Ford which pulled up to the curb across the street and disgorged, surprisingly, four people—three women and a squat, long-armed man whose head was heavily bandaged.

He looked away, and precisely because the thing was so unlikely allowed himself to hope that these were some of his rich relatives, come to show him off to one of their friends. They would come in, polite, mildly amused, and Simon would be introduced as a poet. How happy they were to introduce him as a poet! How that saved the whole situation! He would carry on a kind of guerrilla war against them. He would turn to the prettiest woman and say: "Perhaps I have sold you a pair of shoes downtown? I am a poet four days of the week. The rest of the time I sell shoes." He would start a political discussion so that, knowing the arguments of their side better than they, he might demonstrate the shallowness of their rather sporty radicalism. Or he would show them his rooms, painted orange-crates and all, letting them understand that he much preferred this to their modern apartments.

Outside, the group crossed the street and stood now on the sidewalk in front of Simon's house—which was, in fact, the only house left on a block long given over to garages and warehouses. For all his myopia, Simon could see now that they were Negroes and that the man wore a sort of terry-cloth towel wrapped about his head. Half-obscured by the weeds of the lawn, they stood there immobile, like a fresco of dancers. What did they want? What were they waiting for? After a while he looked away to the sunset, now merging downward with the glow that rose from the other side of the park. Then a dilapidated truck rattled around the corner and stopped, and Simon realized that these people were moving into his house.

The idea came easily, without shock, as though his first concern was, defensively, to recall that he was a man of the spirit and that *the house was not necessarily his.* The ancestral mansion

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belonged to an Insurance Company. They would have torn it down long ago—so they had often assured him—were it not for the fact that Simon's father, an old friend of the Company's president, had expressed the desire that his son should live in the house as long as he pleased. Now, doubtless, they were trying to smoke him out with undesirable neighbors. . . . For a moment, Simon sat quite calmly, pulling his lip and considering what attitude he should take. The squat man with the bandaged head —one of his legs was shorter than the other—was hopping about with great agility, helping the truck-driver unload mattresses, bed-springs, ancient dressers and even (Simon peered out through the arched window and caught every detail) some painted orange crates. But execrably painted, like the canvas wall of a side-show tent. He decided, finally, upon consternation; and he had a moment of bitterness. He was poor, patronized by fools, ignored by his peers. This was indeed the last straw!

He jumped up, ran to his bedroom, seized his old opera cape and the stick he had inherited from his great-grandfather. After a moment's reflection, he also took his black Homburg hat. Thus accoutred, what would he do? Throw himself into the lake? Deliver a denunciation from the porch-steps? He hadn't the vaguest idea. Perhaps, at bottom, he did not really believe that these people were coming to live in his house. He was five feet four inches tall, quite serious, quite consternated. Yet he gave an almost joyful laugh, muttered *sic transit gloria,* and imagined himself describing to his friends what a droll figure he made as he ran to the foyer and opened the door.

He found himself face to face with the Negro. The three women were still choreographically grouped on the sidewalk. The empty truck had driven away. Simon dropped his stick, picked it up, found the man's outstretched hand before him. He shook it.

"My name's Wiley Bey," said the Negro, in a very deep voice.

"Yes, of course."

"Wiley *Bey*."

There was a moment of silence.

"I'm not moving in here to hide out," said the Negro. "They can't scare me or the Temple with newspaper articles. I told the man, if the government ask where I live, just tell them."

"Yes, of course, I see," muttered Simon again. He was in-

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timidated and confused. Under the spotless, almost delicate order of the terry-cloth turban, the man's ugliness was imposing. His face was fleshy, with an enormous fat glistening nose, large black eyes, thick lips. He was scarcely taller than Simon, but his great chest and broad shoulders gave the impression of size and power. Perhaps, for once, he too was embarassed or confused, for he stared at Simon with a slow, baleful, pendulum-like movement of his head, until the white man said:

"O yes, how stupid of me. Simon's the name, Charles Rodney Simon."

Wiley Bey nodded gravely.

"The name sounds Jewish, but it's not. My background is Scotch-Norman. In fact it's my personal opinion that Simon was originally not a family but a christian name. It's easy to imagine young Norman nobles named Jean Simon de Monfort, or Robert Simon de la Tour becoming John Simon and Robert Simon. A question of primogeniture, no doubt. On the other hand—"

"Have you got the key?"

"You flatter me!"

"The man at the office said you had the key, in case he didn't get here."

"Why yes, of course! You mean the key to upstairs," cried Simon with a nervous laugh. "Imagine! I rushed out here to help you move in and I forgot the key entirely. . . . But that's nonsense, don't believe a word of it. I was really quite annoyed when I saw you coming in. No one took the trouble to inform me, you know. And yet this house has been in the family for three generations. Ah well, at my back I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near. And why didn't he hand you over the key in the first place? He's a fool, that man is, and a moral coward to boot." He drew back a step and cocked his head. "Are you quite determined to move into this place? . . . I find it picturesque, but not very practical."

The Negro stared at him, like an expressionless ebony idol.

"But pay no attention to me," said Simon. "Idiotic! . . . Now let me see. The key."

Wiley Bey turned to the women on the sidewalk and announced, in a tone of dispassionate disgust: "It's a white man!" The women broke their group, each attaching herself to a small

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piece of furniture and dragging or carrying it to the steps. Simon found the man's black eyes upon him again."

"What the devil could I have done with that key," he muttered, feeling about in his pockets. "Do you know that nobody's been upstairs for years. The floor is liable to collapse. Ha, ha! If it does, then I'm the one to catch it!"

He ran inside, rummaged in a drawer and found the two keys on a silver ring. The separate entrance to the second floor had been installed at the time of his father's wedding; the key-ring had belonged to his father; for a moment Simon stared at it unbelievingly and then, still wearing his opera cape and Homburg hat, brought it out to Wiley Bey, who was staggering up the stairs with a mattress slung over his head. Here, Simon stopped and thought: But this is absurd. I'm giving this creature my father's key. Am I or am I not the lord of the manor? But all the humor and reality had gone out of it, and when the Negro popped his head from under the mattress, transfixing him with his extraordinary black eyes, Simon hastened to unlock the door, pushed it back on its rusty hinges and helped the man carry his burden upstairs. And when he went down again it seemed quite natural, indeed necessary, to pick up a bedpost and take it to the woman who stood waiting on the porch. And then to handle one end of a chest of drawers while the Negro, grasping the other end, grunted "Steady now, right, left, now we got it." . . . Simon was unused to physical labor. His muscles soon began to ache unbearably. Moreover, in manoeuvring a rope-bound crate through the doorway, he painfully crushed his fingers against the jamb. Yet he continued feverishly to shuttle between sidewalk and stairs.

Why? He thought of nothing. Once, one of the women, a tall flat-faced creature with her kinky hair braided into pigtails, murmured: "You are very kind." For the rest, the three women maintained their mysterious silence. Wiley Bey thanked him gravely, but after a while seemed to forget that he was there. In fact, were it not for his febrile insistence, Simon would not have been able to help at all. Yet he could not go away: the whole feeling of this strange event was too unclear. On the one hand, intermittently, he was carried away by an unaccustomed elan of generosity and fraternity, a kind of drunkenness. He babbled incessantly, he laughed for little or no reason, and asked

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pointless questions which no one bothered to answer. Once he launched into a half-serious harangue on the relation of the races, attributing to a "dear but misguided friend" some notions of his own about Negroes, which he now attacked with a curious mixture of subtlety and offensive buffoonery. He ended with an almost ribald joke and was so thunderstruck by Wiley Bey's black look that he fell silent for several minutes. On the other hand, Simon felt a real and profound sadness as the second floor apartment took on the shape and appearance of a home. Something real was ending, something which he had transformed and played with, as he did with all real things—but which, no matter how, had been part of him. His "consternation" became resentment, directed not at Wiley Bey, but at the World and Time which thus buried his chosen, half-serious, secretly cherished past under a pile of ugly and malodorous furniture.

When it had all been brought up and he had stood for a moment, morosely watching these people move busily about, putting clothes away, adjusting chairs and tables, he suddenly clapped his hand to his head and cried:

"But look here! You can't go through with this!"

"What's that?" said Wiley Bey, looking up from a trunk. He had been silent and preoccupied all evening, a man who exuded authority and power. The tall woman, who was lighting some candles on the mantelpiece, turned around. The other two came out of the kitchen and stood in the doorway.

"You don't know what this house means to me," said Simon, his voice breaking. "I was born in this room. There used to be a big armchair in this corner, next to a black walnut bookcase."

"I'm sorry," said Wiley Bey, bending again to his trunk. "Nobody told us anything about that."

There followed a long silence. It became in the end so unbearable that Simon blurted out the first things that came to his mind.

"Forgive my behaving like Banquo's ghost," he said. "Or rather like the spectre at the banquet, or whatever it was. But you must admit, it's all very odd. Not intrinsically odd, perhaps, but the effect is, if you know what I mean. And a Negro no less! An American instance! Do you know, my grandfather owned a slave? Not that he needed one, but just to show he was a copper-

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head, in 1860. . . . And a Mohammedan to boot, harem and all! Or are these your sisters? Ha, ha, can you fancy me in the role of a eunuch?"

He would have said more, in his delirium, but he had not the time. He felt his throat seized by an enormous hand, and for a terrifying instant looked into the face of Wiley Bey. Then he was spun around, grasped by the collar and the slack of his pants, and half-carried, half pushed through the doorway. Stumbling, he turned around drunkenly, and the door slammed shut in his face.

II

Having been thrown out of the Negro's apartment, Simon quite naturally went back. In fact, no sooner had he found himself in the hall, with the door inexorably shut in his face, and his mouth bitter with the taste of insult and humiliation, than he was moved by an impulse to put his eye to the keyhole! Not that his distress and anger were not real, but his childish curiosity was equally real and (as he had learned from long experience) far more enduring. Mastering his impulse with difficulty, he went downstairs and paced the floor of his living-room, savoring the bitter feelings, the rage of the déclassé, the sense of degradation (how ignominiously the seat of his pants had been gathered in that enormous paw!) but nonetheless cocking his ear from time to time lest a significant movement from above should escape him. . . . Later, as he wrote a long account of the Negro's arrival in his journal, he heard the low plucking of a large string instrument, probably a guitar, and faintly the voice of a woman singing some weird oriental song. For a moment, Wiley Bey's deep voice, vibrantly, and then the music (to which Simon had listened open-mouthed, with delight) faded away. He determined to lodge a protest, in fact only physical terror saved him from thumping on the ceiling with the handle of a broom. It was not enough that these people were Negroes, and smelled queerly like all Negroes. They were given to singing in the dead of the night! At the same time, putting the finishing touches to his *pages de journal,* Simon found himself understanding the Negro's wrath, lingering over his fierce aspect—and, with a little smile of satisfaction, appreciating the dramatic quality of the evening's events.

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The next morning, he actually went to the office and lodged his protest, but by that time his resentment seemed unimportant, and in any case useless; indeed he realized instantly that he had come only in the hope of learning something about Wiley Bey. He ended by "performing" his indignation, as he sometimes performed for his friends; and by parrying the man's insinuations about the arrears on his rent.

He felt that something was going to happen: something portentous, perhaps decisive. So that, later in the day, when he caught the first rumbling of the "Wiley Bey Case," he was scarcely surprised. A small rumbling it was—a set of insinuations hidden on a back-page of a local newspaper—but Simon, who spent hours exchanging gossip with butchers and barbers, caught it and kept it alive. . . . For two days he waited in ambush for Wiley Bey: to no avail. He sat by his window, mulling over in his mind the ambiguous phrases he had read, the endless possibilities, the moral problem. This astonishing Negro—what was he after, what did he mean?

At last, late in the afternoon of the third day, Simon contrived to meet Wiley Bey on the porch steps. It was very difficult. The Negro smiled and said hello as though nothing had happened: he deprecated nothing, excused nothing, simply broadened his dazzling smile (which seemed to flatten indefinitely the shiny black nose) and invited Simon to continue the conversation upstairs.

There—it all happened so swiftly that Simon had for an instant the feeling that it had been planned in advance (but by whom?)—Wiley Bey arranged his short leg before him and sank into the armchair. It obviously belonged to him. Simon sat rigidly in an ancient loveseat, with his elbow uncomfortably propped on the chipped armrest. In the broad dullness of the afternoon, the apartment swallowed up the few pieces of furniture, the almost invisible pictures. Only Wiley Bey, with his absurd and magnificent turban, seemed fully there, at ease, exhausting the allotted space. He was in a warm mood. He rubbed his enormous blood-red palms and smiled slowly, like a paternal Buddha. Simon stared at the white teeth in the glistening black face, and found nothing to say.

At last, timidly, he hoped that Wiley Bey had straightened out his ah, difficulties with the draft board.

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On the contrary, said the Negro. This morning he had received a note, warning him to present his appeal tonight. In general, Wiley Bey did not recognize the right of these people to order him about as they pleased, and in any case such abominably short notice only proved (he smiled blandly and leaned back in his chair) that they were out to get his hide. Everyone in the neighborhood, even the landlords and storekeepers who ran the draft board, knew where *he* would be tonight.

"But I don't understand," said Simon. "Surely with your ah, physical handicap, they don't expect—"

"That has nothing to do with it," said Wiley Bey. "They want me to register as an American citizen."

"They do! And you registered as—?"

"A Moslem, of course."

With that, he winked: a wink such as Simon had never seen before, the most shameless, the most guileless, the most mad!

"O yes, to be sure, as a Moslem!" cried Simon. And, to hide his amazement and because he had nothing better to say, he assumed an air of intense chattiness: "That's very interesting! You must tell me about that! I understand there are several sects?"

Wiley Bey leaned forward and frowned. Solemn, ministerial, he suddenly reminded Simon of a Jew he had seen in Vienna, an old man who had emerged from the rear of his shop, clad in his colorful ritual garments, his eyes still lost in the misty distance of prayer. The old Jew had removed his prayer shawl, rubbed his hands, focussed his eyes and presto! he was a merchant.

"You are lost," intoned Wiley Bey. "You don't know where to turn. . . ."

Withal, he kept his warmth and good humor, his curious mixture of falseness and sincerity, the unsaintly attitude of a political believer: a man capable, (as we later discovered) of misusing the funds of his church; and of all sorts of petty calculations. And immensely naif! He shook his finger under Simon's nose.

"You are one of God's humble creatures," he said, "even though you are white. But like most of my people, you're tortured by the idea that you need dignity."

"That's very true," said Simon voluptuously.

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"Dignity! What they mean is *demeanor*—a window-shade to hide their flesh and their sin!"

"Why that's a very good remark," cried Simon. "Excellent! I must remember that! And may I say in passing that you yourself have plenty of demeanor, what with that turban of yours and your solemn air. But of course you don't find that funny, and at bottom I don't mean it to be. When it pops out that way, it sounds insulting. The fact is—I'm an artist." He paused a moment, cocking his head. "I mean I'm a poet, I write poetry."

"Yes?"

"Please believe me—I have the greatest respect for you. I'm excited, and so everything comes out topsy-turvy. In fact, when I'm with you I feel slightly wacky, so to speak, I can't quite decide what tone to take. To begin with, I have an ambiguous feeling towards you. You've at once outraged me, by moving into my house and all that, and you've intrigued me with your turbans and mysteries and air of superior knowledge. Secondly, I'm a poet of the old school. I haven't the faintest idea how to talk to people who don't read poetry and don't give a damn about it."

"It so happens," said Wiley Bey, "that I'm very fond of poetry. For me, the greatest of them all is Ahmed Ali, a Negro who wrote in Alexandria, in the 12th century."

"I flatter myself," Simon went on, "that mine is the fundamentally poetic endowment. I feel everyone's feelings to the point where I have almost none of my own. At the same time, one must live, that is make decisions and have attitudes. It's very difficult. . . . And then there's this country!" Simon rolled his eyes and made a gesture of desperation. "Do you see what I mean?"

At that moment, one of the women—a slatternly sexy-looking girl who seemed to be wearing nothing at all beneath her apron—came into the room and whispered something in Wiley Bey's ear. The Negro turned to Simon:

"Excuse me a moment, do you have any money?"

"Not very much," said Simon apprehensively.

"Do you mind lending me a dollar?"

Simon handed over his dollar. Being very poor and very miserly, this was in the nature of a catastrophe. Yet for a moment he was quite carried away by the simplicity of the Negro in taking

(*Continued on page* 281)

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PARIS-AM-SEINE

—Monsieur avez-vous ouï parler de Paris-sur-Seine
Je voudrais y aller pour un jour—une heure—
Y revoir la maison où je suis né
La rue où je suis né
Les rues où j'allais par les pluvieuses nuits
Sur les traces de mes millions d'abeilles
Glaner le miel de mes rêves
Monsieur du guichet

—Paris-sur-Seine—oui—il me semble avoir ouï
C'était un terrible pays
Une vestale terrible coiffée de bastilles et de dômes
Comme d'une mantille d'argent
Mon fils—car j'ai un fils—il a dix ans
Parfois m'en parle
Au dessert ça le passionne
Le passé
Les siècles passés
Les temps anciens
Les villes ensevelies englouties les Pompées les reines Saba
Les vieux pastels de l'histoire

—Monsieur du guichet
Je voudrais à Paris-Sur-Seine revoir
Le pavé onduler en Place de Grève et
Les faubourgs charrier des glaçons de sang et
La banlieue arborer son rouge ceinturon et
Sainte Genevieve bénir les glaïeuls et

—Chut—pas si fort—
Sainte Genevieve est morte dit-on
Condamnée dit-on
Par le cent-quarante-neuvième tribunal d'exception
Pour dévergondage public

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PARIS-AM-SEINE

—Sir have you ever heard of Paris-sur-Seine
I should like to go there for a day—for an hour—
To see once more the house I was born in
The street I was born in
The streets I walked on rainy nights
Following my millions of bees
To glean the honey of my dreams
Mister ticket-seller

—Paris-sur-Seine—yes—the name is familiar
A fearful country
A terrible virgin with a headdress of bastilles and domes
Like a silver mantilla
My son—I have one—is ten years old
After supper he gets excited about it
The past
Centuries past
The ancient times
The drowned buried cities the Pompeys the Queens of Sheba
The old flowers of history

—Mister ticket-seller
I should like to go to Paris-sur-Seine to see once more
The sidewalk heave on the Place de Grève and
The faubourgs sweep along their icefloes of blood and
The suburbs lift up their red belt and
Saint Genevieve bless the gladioli and

—Shh—not so loud—
Saint Genevieve is dead they say
Sentenced they say
By the one hundred and forty-ninth special commission
For obscene behavior in a public place

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—Monsieur du guichet
Je voudrais savoir si à Paris-sur-Seine l'automne file sa laine
Dans les arbres de mon enfance
Si les vieux hôtels toujours racontent à quelles profondeurs
remontent
Ma noblesse ma gloire

—Taissez-vous—j'ai un fils—
Vous me feriez révoquer—il a dix ans—
Tenez—au dessert—il n'y a pas longtemps—

—Monsieur du guichet
Je voudrais connaître

—Vous voudriez connaître eh bien prenez le train pour A
Changez à B couchez à C débarquez à D et là
La puce à l'oreille mais la main à la bourse
Demandez secrétement
Ténébreusement
L'anonyme gondolier
Le passeur
Le rameur
Le transbordeur
Celui qui sait la démarcation
La zone
L'interzone
Celui qui connaît le Styx mon ami comme le pouilleux
Ses poux

—Je prends le train pour A

—Prenez le train pour A prenez-le pour Z
Pour l'une quelconque des trente-deux aires de la rose des vents
Dieu est partout et tous les chemins
Mènent en Allemagne

JEAN MALAQUAIS

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—Mister ticket-seller
I should like to know whether in Paris-sur-Seine autumn spins its wool
In the trees of my childhood
Whether the old mansions still speak of the depths to which mount
My nobility my glory

—Shut up—I have a son—
You'll get me fired—he's ten—
Look—after supper—just the other day—

—Mister ticket-seller
I should like to know

—You should like to know well then take the train to A
Change at B sleep at C get off at D and there
Your eyes open and your cash in hand
Search out quietly
Discreetly

The nameless gondelier
The ferryman
The rower
The middleman
The one who knows the boundary
The zone
The interzone
The one who knows the Styx my friend as the fleabitten
His fleas

—So I take the train to A

—Take the train to A take it to Z
To any one of the thirty-two points of the compass
God is everywhere and all roads
Lead to Germany

(*Translated by Dwight Macdonald*)

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C'ETAIT UN JEUNE HOMME BLOND

C'était un jeune homme blond
vêtu de vert amande
il aimait les tulipes
et le fromage de Hollande

Il aimait le blé
des plaines ukrainiennes
les oeufs du Denmark
les liqueurs anciennes

Les sauces provençales
les poulets de Bresse
l'ail et l'ailloli
et le vin de messe

C'était un jeune homme blond

Il portait un chapeau
en acier coniforme
et buvait à déjeuner
son bol de chloroforme

Et tout à la fois
mangeait des grenades
avalait le feu
éteignait les cascades

Décousait les montagnes
fracassait les villes
Asséchait les mers
y noyait les îles

C'était un jeune homme blond

Une croix de fer
bardait sa poitrine
à l'endroit du ventre
il avait une vitrine

A l'endroit de l'oeil
il avait une noix
et en place de coeur
trois petits doigts

Qui battaient la mesure
au pas de l'oie
dans le ventre glacé
sous la fière croix

C'était un jeune homme blond

Il allait tonnant
j'ai dans ma giberne
de quoi vous pendre
à la plus proche lanterne

De quoi extraire
de vos dents une auréole
pomper de vos cervelles
des barriques de pétrole

Et à coups de botte
envoyer le monde
s'asseoir chez Dieu
à la table ronde

C'était un jeune homme blond

Mais un jour de veine
des gouttes de suif
tomberont peut-etre
de la barbe du Juif

Comme du haut de la hune
un palan de sang
sur les trois petits doigts
du jeune homme blond

Ah le blond jeune homme
how diddle you do
il était orgueilleux
agenouillons-nous

C'était un jeune homme blond

JEAN MALAQUAIS

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THERE WAS A BLOND YOUNG MAN

There was a blond young man
Dressed in the green of the trees
Tulips he loved
And good Dutch cheese

He was fond of the wheat
From the flat Ukraine
The very best wines
And eggs from the Dane

Provencale sauces
Pullets from Bresse
Garlic and capon-wings
And *vin du messe*

There was a blond young man

He wore a steel hat
Convex in form
At breakfast he drank
His chloroform

And all of the time he
Ate hand grenades
Swallowed hot fire
Dried up the cascades

Knocked down the hills
Smashed flat the towns
Emptied the seas
And flooded the downs

There was a blond young man

An iron cross
On his chest you could see
A window was set
Where his belly should be

In place of his eye
A nut of wood
And in place of his heart
Three fingers stood

A goosestep march
They drum out with force
In the glassy guts
Under the cross

There was a blond young man

I've got it he roared
In my blanket roll
The stuff to hang you
On the handiest pole

To pick from your teeth
The golden foil
To drain from your skulls
Barrels of oil

All of you bastards
At my command
Will take up your seats
At God's right hand

There was a blond young man

But on some lucky day
Drops of greasy dew
Will fall perhaps
From the beard of a Jew

Like a ribbon of blood
From the mast's high span
To the three little fingers
Of the blond young man

Ah blond young man
How diddle you do
You were hungry and proud
Let us pray for you

There was a blond young man

(*Translated by Dwight Macdonald*)

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Art Chronicle

ENGLISH ABSTRACT PAINTING

IT IS PERHAPS surprising that there has been so slight a connection between the American and British movements in abstract painting and sculpture,—a factor which has been becoming increasingly more apparent as the two countries develop their individual approaches. In the earlier days of modern art, when the few English and American pioneers in the field were isolated at home, occasionally they would meet on common ground in Paris or Munich. However, during the last decade, as the continental centers of culture succumbed to suppression and apprehension, London and New York became centers in their own right. Contrasting with the swift migrations of surrealism, the American and English abstract artists remain curiously oblivious of each other's development; the situation has of course been exaggerated by the war, when progressive art-magazines are suspended and the exchange of pictures, so slight in this field anyway, has finally ceased entirely.

The abstract movement in England has lost none of its momentum. It continues without compromise, and we show a few examples that will indicate the current trends. Of course many younger artists have had to abandon their work, and others have been reduced to the status of Sunday (or furlough) painters. The sculptors are handicapped by lack of materials and several (Hepworth and Moore, for example) concentrate on drawings and projects. Owing to the more immediate ravages of war the pinch is naturally sharper than here. Group-exhibitions have long been difficult to assemble, and the artists themselves work mostly in isolated country-villages. On account of difficulties in contact, and the privations under which photography is now laboring in England, we make no attempt at being inclusive. Several (Stephenson for instance) do not appear merely because they were not heard from.

Against such a background it is strange to find the English movement so much more homogeneous than our own. The works, although expressively varied, have more of a "family resemblance" than any show America could assemble, or even any group from pre-war Paris. The circular compositional scheme, the contrast of hair-lines with bold solid masses, seem to have become a sort of national language; even Moore employs them, although emotionally he is pushing away from the others, back toward a new expressionist figuration.

Perhaps too much should not be read into so restricted a selection, but the temptation for further comparison is very strong. I think that any American abstract group would appear unmistakably romantic in comparison with what we see on these pages. What this country presents is a greater variety of surface textures, perhaps a more "painter-like" touch. Our work moves under a looser control, while the British artists seem sharply constructivist in any comparison. Let us hope that the "obstinate" quality they so tellingly impart is sowing seeds for a post-war renaissance that will relate its art strongly to the new forms of our modern surroundings.

GEORGE L. K. MORRIS

(See illustrations following page 224)

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The Heiress of All the Ages

Philip Rahv

HENRY JAMES is not fully represented in his novels by any one single character, but of his principal heroine it can be said that she makes the most of his vision and dominates his drama of transatlantic relations. This young woman is his favorite American type, appearing in his work time and again under various names and in various situations that can be taken as so many stages in her career. Hence it is in the line of her development that we must study her. Her case involves a principle of growth which is not to be completely grasped until she has assumed her final shape.

This heroine, too, is cast in the role, so generic to James, of the "passionate pilgrim," whose ordinary features are those of the "good American bewildered in presence of the European order." But bewilderment is not a lasting motive in this heroine's conduct; unlike most of her fellow-pilgrims in James's novels, she soon learns how to adjust European attitudes to the needs of her personality. Where she excels is in her capacity to plunge into experience without paying the usual Jamesian penalty for such daring—the penalty being either the loss of one's moral balance or the recoil into a state of aggrieved innocence. She responds "magnificently" to the beauty of the old-world scene even while keeping a tight hold on her native virtue: the ethical stamina, good will, and inwardness of her own provincial background. And thus living up to her author's idea both of Europe and America, she is able to mediate, if not wholly to resolve, the conflict between the two cultures, between innocence and experience, between the sectarian code of the fathers and the more 'civilized' though also more devious and dangerous code of the

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lovers. No wonder James commends her in terms that fairly bristle with heroic intentions and that in the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* he goes so far as to credit her with the great historic boon of being "that certain sort of young American," exceptionally endowed with "liberty of action, of choice, of appreciation, of contact . . . who is more the 'heir of all the ages' than any other young person whatsoever."

If James's relation to his native land is in question, then more is to be learned from this young woman's career than from any number of discursive statements quoted from his letters, essays, and autobiographies. "It's a complete fate being an American," he wrote. Yes, but what does this fate actually come to in his work? The answer, it seems to me, is mostly given in his serial narrative of the heiress of all the ages.

The initial assignment of this heroine is to reconnoiter the scene rather than take possession of it. As yet she is not recognized as the legitimate heiress but merely as a candidate for the inheritance. Such is the part played by Mary Garland, for instance, a small-town girl from New England who herself feels the pull of the "great world" even as she tries to save her errant lover from its perils (*Roderick Hudson,* 1875). Daisy Miller, a young lady whose friends are distressed by the odd mixture of spontaneous grace, audacity, and puerility in her deportment, is also cast in this role, though with somewhat special and limited intentions. Bessie Alden, a more cultivated and socially entrenched figure than the famous Daisy, voyages to England—inevitably so—for the sake of enjoying its picturesque associations; and she is noteworthy as the first of the James girls to reap the triumph of turning down the proposal of an old-world aristocrat. But it is in Isabel Archer (*The Portrait of a Lady*) that we first encounter this heroine in a truly pivotal position, comprising the dramatic consequences of a conflict not merely of manners but of morals as well. In Isabel her heretofore scattered traits are unified and corrected in the light of James's growing recognition of the importance of her claims. Two decades later, at the time when his writing had settled into the so portentously complex style of his ultimate period, she reappears as the masterful though

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stricken Milly Theale of *The Wings of the Dove* and as the impeccable Maggie Verver of *The Golden Bowl,* to whom all shall be given. These last displays of her are by far the most accomplished, for in them her function as "princess" and "heiress" is fully defined and affirmed.

The evolution of our heroine thus gives us the measure of James's progressively rising estimate of that American fate to the account of which he devoted the greater part of his work. The account opens with the simple, almost humble, instances of Mary Garland and Daisy Miller, who are baffled and shamed by Europe, and closes with the "prodigious" success of Maggie Verver, to whom Europe offers itself as a dazzling and inexhaustible opportunity. What is the heiress, then, if not a character-image of aggrandizement on every level of meaning and existence? She is that in her own right, as the representative American mounting "Europe's lighted and decorated stage"; but she also serves James as the objective equivalent of his own increase and expansion as man and artist. This is all the more striking when we consider that both author and heroine entered upon their careers under seemingly inauspicious circumstances. At the start they are beset by the traditional scruples of their race, by fits of enervation and recurrent feelings of inferiority; yet as both mature he achieves a creative dignity and consciousness of well-nigh lordly dimensions, while she comes to value herself and to be valued by the world at large as the personage appointed by history to inherit the bounty of the ages. Francis Fergusson has aptly summed up this entire process of growth in remarking that James "developed a society manner into a grand manner much as he developed a rich American girl into a larger, sober, Bérénice-like stage queen."

Such exceptional prosperity is hardly to be explained in terms of individual aptitude alone. Certain large conditions make it possible, such as America's precipitant rise as a national power in the late 19th century; its enhanced self-knowledge and self-confidence; and, more particularly, the avid desire of its upper classes to obtain forthwith the rewards and prerogatives of high civilization. The truth is that for qualities of a surpassingly bourgeois and imperial order James's heiress is without parallel in American fiction. Note that this millionaire's daughter is an heiress in moral principle no less than in material fact, and that

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James, possessed of a firmer faith in the then existing structure of society than most novelists and wholly sincere in his newly-gained worldliness, tends to identify her moral with her material superiority.* Yet in the long run she cannot escape the irony—the inner ambiguity—of her status. For her wealth is at once the primary source of her so lavishly pictured "greatness" and "liberty" and the source of the evil she evokes in others. There is no ignoring the consideration, however, that in the case of the heiress, as in the case of most of James's rich Americans, money is in a sense but the prerequisite of moral delicacy. What with her 'higher interests' and pieties, the rigor of her conscience and the nicety of her illusions, what is she really if not a graduate of the school of Boston Transcendentalism? Her author's imagination operated according to the law of the conversion of the lower into the higher, and by means of this ideal logic his heroine's debut in the "social successful worldly world" is transformed into a kind of spiritual romance. What James knew best of all is, of course, how to take things immensely for granted; and not to appreciate the wonder of his beguilement is to miss the poetry, the story, the very life of his fictions.

To grasp the national-cultural values implicit in the progress of his heroine is to be done once and for all with the widely-held

*Some critics writing about James in the early 1930's sought to put him in line with the leftist trend of the times. This sort of intention is evident in Robert Cantwell's several essays of that period and to a lesser extent in Stephen Spender's study, *The Destructive Element*. These critics overlook, it seems to me, the depth of the conservative illusion in James, and that is why they are forced to exaggerate the meaning of novels like *The Ivory Tower* and *The Princess Casamassima*. Even though in the latter the atmosphere of class conflict is genuine enough, its revolutionary theme cannot be taken at face value. For imbedded in this novel is the more familiar theme of the passionate pilgrim—the pilgrim being the hero, Hyacinth Robinson, who sees the "immeasurable misery of the people" but who also sees, even more clearly and passionately, "all that has been, as it were, rescued and redeemed from it: the treasures, the felicities, the splendors, the successes of the world"; and in the end, when the final choice is put to him, he takes his stand not with the people but with the "world" resting upon their misery. Thus Robinson is enticed by the same image that draws the Jamesian Americans to Europe. The one variation is that he constructs this image out of class rather than national or, so to speak, hemispheric differences.

So far as the political estimate of James is concerned, one cannot but agree with Joseph Warren Beach that he is basically a "gentleman of cultivated and conservative, not to say, reactionary instinct, who will generally be found to favor the same line of conduct as that favored by the ecclesiastical and civil law, as far as the law goes" (*The Method of Henry James*). So blunt a characterisation is likely to offend the James-cultists, but I think it can stand so long as we take it in a strictly political sense, not as a judgment of his moral realism. On that score Spender is closer to the truth in observing that James "saw through the life of his age" but that he "cherished the privilege that enabled him to see through it."

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assumption that to James the country of his birth always signified failure and sterility. Edmund Wilson is surely right in contending that it is America which really "gets the better of it in Henry James." Such an interpretation is consistent with his return to the theme of the heiress at the turn of the century, with his honorific treatment of her, his enamored tone and laudatory report of her aims and prospects—her aims and prospects being not merely those of a typical Jamesian aspirant but of an American emissary endowed with a character "intrinsically and actively ample . . . reaching southward, westward, anywhere, everywhere." As the years passed James's awareness of the American stake in the maintenance of civilization grew increasingly positive and imposing. In his later writings old Europe serves once more as the background for young America, and his restored interest in the nuclear fable of the passionate pilgrim is now worked out on a more ambitious scale and with more intricate artistic intentions. His last great novels are remarkable, too, for the resurgence in them of that native idealism—that "extraordinary good faith"—the effect of which in his early fiction was to link him with the classic masters of American literature. In *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* the motives and standards of this idealism are applied to the mixed disorder and splendor of the "great world," now no longer simply admired from afar but seen from within.

But the question whether the ultimate loyalty of James is claimed by Europe or America is hardly as meaningful as it has appeared to some of his interpreters. For actually his valuations of Europe and America are not the polar opposites but the two commanding centres of his work—the contending sides whose relation is adjusted so as to make mutual assimilation feasible. It is the only means by which the Jamesian idea of heritage can be brought to fruition. What his detractors can never forgive him, however, is his bursting the bounds of that autarchic Americanism of which Whitman is the chief exponent. Never having fallen into the habit of "glowing belligerently with one's country," he is able to invest his characters with an historic mission and propel them into spheres of experience as yet closed to them at home. They are the people named as the Ambassadors—and the nationalist critics who make so much of his expatriation should be reminded that

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there is a world of difference between the status of an ambassador and the status of a fugitive.

James's all-inclusive choice is dramatised in his recurrent story of the marriage of an eminent new-world bride to an equally eminent old-world groom. The marriage is symbolic of the reconciliation of their competing cultures; and if it sometimes turns out badly, as in *The Portrait of a Lady*, or if it fails to come off altogether, as in *The Wings of the Dove*, James still holds fast to his scheme, continuing his experiments in matchmaking till finally, in *The Golden Bowl*, all the parts fall into their proper place, the marriage is consummated and bears luxurious fruit. Observe, though, that this happy ending is postponed again and again until the American wife, in the person of Maggie Verver, has established herself as the ruling member of the alliance.

The advancement of this heroine takes on historical form against the period-background of the American female's rise to a position of cultural prestige and authority. She it was who first reached out for the "consummations and amenities" of life while her male relatives were still earnestly engaged in procuring its "necessities and preparations." No wonder W. D. Howells declared that "the prosperity of our fiction resides in the finer female sense." Now James's so-called feminine orientation is to be explained partly by this social fact and partly by his instinct, the most exquisite possible, for private relations and for their latent refinement of tact and taste. So estranged was he from typical masculine interests that he could not but fall back more and more on the subject of marriage, a subject dominated, in his treatment of it, by the 'social' note and meeting the "finer female sense" on its own preferred ground.* Moreover, he could have found no better framework of realistic detail for his picture of "young American innocence transplanted to European air." And if his stories of marriage are mostly stories, as he himself once put it, about "very young women, who, affected with a certain

*In *The Point of View*, a story published in the early 80's, James inserts the following ironic reference to himself into the Paris-bound letter of a French visitor to New York: "They have a novelist here with pretensions to literature, who writes about the chase for the husband and the adventures of the rich Americans in our corrupt old Europe, where their primeval candor puts the Europeans to shame. *C'est proprement écrit;* but it's terribly pale." In later years he would hardly have enjoyed any such ironic play at his own expense, for with age self-deprecation gave way to portentousness in his estimate of himself.

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high lucidity, thereby become characters," it is because all the conditions of his art made for such a choice.

His male figures are, generally speaking, to be identified with his less masterful side, with the negative component of his sense of experience and the masochistic tendency to refuse the natural gifts of life. It is in deviating from this code of refusal that Roderick Hudson goes to pieces. In *The Ambassadors* Lembert Strether learns the lesson of *not* refusing, but his adventure in Paris gains its point from the sheer process of his learning that lesson rather than from his application of it. Nor can one overlook the repeated appearance in James of certain sad and uncertain young men who vie with each other in devising painfully subtle motives for renouncing their heart's desire once it is within their grasp. One such specimen is the young man (Bernard Longmore in *Madame de Mauves*) who is revolted by the idea of making love to the woman whose happiness he tries to save. Another is the incredibly appealing though emotionally dense Mr. Wendover, who has "no more physical personality than a consulted thermometer" and who, courting the girl he loves with more propriety than imagination, fails her when she needs him most (*A London Life*). In point of fact, the heiress is the one native Jamesian who knows exactly what she wants. She, too, is confronted, to be sure, by "beautiful difficulties," but they are never of the kind that spring from some crucial frustration or of the kind that can be translated into some moral issue, which is then to be carefully isolated and solved in a chessboard fashion. In her case the "beautiful difficulties" spring out of her very search for self-fulfilment and impetuosity in "taking full in the face the whole assault of life."

It is with a bright and sudden flutter of self-awareness that Mary Garland reveals, in a brief passage of dialogue, the state of mind of the heiress as she sets out to meet her fate. The occasion for it is a night-scene in *Roderick Hudson,* when Mary confesses to Rowland Mallet that her stay in Italy has induced a change in her conception of life:

> Mary: "At home . . . things don't speak to us of enjoyment as they do here. Here it's such a mixture; one doesn't know what to believe. Beauty stands here—beauty such as this night and

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> this place and all this sad strange summer have been so full of —and it penetrates one's soul and lodges there and keeps saying that man wasn't made, as we think at home, to struggle so much and to miss so much, but to ask of life as a matter of course some beauty and some charm. This place has destroyed any scrap of consistency that I ever possessed, but even if I must say something sinful I love it!"
> Rowland: "If it's sinful I absolve you—in so far as I have power. We should not be able to enjoy, I suppose, unless we could suffer, and in anything that's worthy of the name of experience—that experience which is the real *taste* of life, isn't it?—the mixture is of the finest and subtlest."

The pathos of this dialogue is the pathos of all the buried things in the American past it recalls us to. It recalls us, moreover, to one of the most telling and precise relations in our literature, that of the early James to Hawthorne.* Consider how this relation is at once contained and developed in Mary's vision of what life holds for those bold enough to ask of it as a matter of course "some beauty and some charm." For Mary is essentially a figure from a novel such as *The Blithedale Romance* or *The Marble Faun* brought forward into a later age; and because of the shift of values that has occurred in the meantime, she is able to express in a mundane fashion those feelings and sentiments that in Hawthorne are still somewhat hidden and only spoken of with a semi-clerical quaver, as if from under a veil. In Mary's confession the spectral consciousness of the perils of beauty, of the evil it hides, is at long last being exorcised, the mind is being cleared of its home-grown fears and mystifications. The reality of experience can no longer be resisted: "Even if I say something sinful I love it!" And having said it, she is absolved of her "sin" by Rowland, who in this scene is manifestly acting for the author. It is Rowland, too, who describes experience as the "real *taste* of life," thus disclosing its innermost Jamesian sense. For in this sense of it the idea of experience is emptied of its more ordinary meanings, of empirical reference, and made to correspond to pure consummation, to that "felt felicity" so often invoked by James, to something lovingly selected or distilled from life—all of which

*Among the first to notice the connection was William James. In 1870 he wrote to his brother: "It tickled my national feeling not a little to note the resemblance of Hawthorne's style to yours and Howells's. . . . That you and Howells, with all the models in English literature to follow, should involuntarily have imitated (as it were) this American, seems to point to the existence of some real mental American quality."

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is perfectly in line with the indicated function of the heiress as the prime consumer of the resources, material and spiritual, of both the Old and the New World. And though it is not within the power of even this superior brand of experience to exempt one from suffering, still the risk is well worth taking so long as "the mixture is of the finest and subtlest."

But in Mary the ferment of experience is as yet more potential than actual. At this stage James is already sure of his heroine's integrity and liveliness of imagination, knowing that in this fine flower of a provincial culture he had gotten hold of an historical prodigy admirably suited to his purpose as a novelist. He is still doubtful, however, of her future, uncertain as to the exact conditions of her entry into the "great world" and of the mutual effect thus created. Daisy Miller and Bessie Alden represent his further experiments with her character. Daisy's social adventures make for a superb recreation of manners and tones and contrasts and similitudes. Spontaneity is her principal quality—a quality retained by the heiress through all her mutations and invariably rendered as beautifully illustrative of the vigor and innocence of the national spirit. But Daisy is altogether the small-town, the average American girl; and by virtue of this fact she lays bare the lowly origin of the heiress in the undifferentiated mass of the new-world democracy. Winterbourne, Daisy's admirer and critic, observes that "she and her mamma have not yet risen to the stage—what shall I call it?—of culture, at which the idea of catching a count or a *marchesse* begins." Bessie, on the other hand, seizes upon this conception only to rise above it. This "Bostonian nymph who rejects an English duke" combines the primal sincerity of her forebears with a Jamesian sensitivity to the "momentos and reverberations of greatness" in the life of ancient aristocracies—and this amalgam of values proves to be beyond the comprehension of Lord Lambeth's simple matter-of-fact mind. Bessie's behavior was resented, of course, by English readers, just as Daisy's was resented by American readers. But the so-challenged author, far from being flustered by the protests that reached him, took it all in with gloating satisfaction, delighted by the contrast, with its "dramas upon dramas . . . and innumerable points of view," thus brought to light. He felt that the emotion of the public vindicated his faith in the theme of the "international situation."

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As the 1870's come to a close, James is done with the preliminary studies of his heroine. Now he undertakes to place her in a longer narrative—*The Portrait of a Lady*—the setting and action of which are at last commensurate with the "mysterious purposes" and "vast designs" of her character. In the preface to the New York edition (written nearly a quarter of a century later) he recalls that the conception of a "certain young woman affronting her destiny had begun with being all my outfit for the large building of the novel"; and he reports that in its composition he was faced with only one leading question: "What will she 'do'?" But this is mainly a rhetorical question, for naturally "the first thing she'll do will be to come to Europe—which in fact will form, and all inevitably, no small part of her principal adventure." *The Portrait* is by far the best novel of James's early prime, bringing to an end his literary apprenticeship and establishing the norms of his world. Its author has not yet entirely divorced himself from Victorian models in point of structure, and as a stylist he is still mindful of the reader's more obvious pleasure, managing his prose with an eye to outward as well as inward effects. It is a lucid prose, conventional yet free, marked by aphoristic turns of phrase and by a kind of intellectual gaiety in the formulation of ideas. There are few signs as yet of that wellnigh metaphysical elaboration of the sensibility by which he is to become known as one of the foremost innovators in modern writing.

Isabel Archer is a young lady of an Emersonian cast of mind, but her affinity as a fictional character is rather with those heroines of Turgenev in whose nature an extreme tenderness is conjoined with unusual strength of purpose.* No sooner does Isabel arrive at the country-house of her uncle Mr. Touchett, an American banker residing in England, than everyone recognizes her for what she is—"a delicate piece of human machinery." Her cousin Ralph questions his mother: "Who is this rare creature, and what is she? Where did you find her?" "I found her," she replies, "in an old house at Albany, sitting in a dreary room on a rainy day. . . . She didn't know she was bored, but when I told

*The influence may well be consicous in this case, though in the preface to the novel James admits to being influenced by the Russian novelist only on the technical plane, with respect to the manner of placing characters in fiction. James's critical essays abound with favorable references to Turgenev, whose friendship he cultivated in Paris and of whom he invariably spoke with enthusiasm.

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her she seemed grateful for the hint. . . . I thought she was meant for something better. It occurred to me it would be a kindness to take her about and introduce her to the world." The American Cinderella thus precipitated from the town of Albany into the "great world" knows exactly what she must look forward to. "To be as happy as possible," she confides in Ralph, "that's what I came to Europe for." It is by no means a simple answer. On a later and more splendid occasion it is to be repeated by Maggie Verver, who proclaims her faith, even as the golden bowl crashes to the ground, in a "happiness without a hole in it . . .the golden bowl as it *was* to have been . . . the bowl with all our happiness in it, the bowl without a crack in it." This is the crowning illusion and pathos, too, of the heiress, that she believes such happiness to be attainable, that money can buy it and her mere good faith can sustain it. And even when eventually her European entanglements open her eyes to the fact that virtue and experience are not so charmingly compatible after all, that the Old World has a fierce energy of its own and that its "tone of time" is often pitched in a sinister key, she still persists in her belief that this same world will yield her a richly personal happiness, proof against the evil spawned by others less fortunate than herself; and this belief is all the more expressive because it is wholly of a piece with the psychology of the heiress as a national type. The ardor of Americans in pursuing happiness as a personal goal is equalled by no other people, and when it eludes them none are so hurt, none so shamed. Happiness, one might say, is really their private equivalent of such ideals as progress and universal justice. They take for granted, with a faith at once deeply innocent and deeply presumptuous, that they deserve nothing less and that to miss it is to miss life itself.

The heiress is not to be humbled by the tests to which life in Europe exposes her. The severer the test the more intense the glow of her spirit. Is she not the child, as Isabel proudly declares, of that "great country which stretches beyond the rivers and across the prairies, blooming and smiling and spreading, till it stops at the blue Pacific! A strong, sweet, fresh odour seems to rise from it. . . ." The Emersonian note is sounded again and again by Isabel. She is truly the Young American so grandly pictured by the Concord idealist in his essay of that title, the

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Young American bred in a land "offering opportunity to the human mind not known in any other region" and hence possessed of an "organic simplicity and liberty, which, when it loses its balance, redresses itself presently. . . ." Witness the following passage of character-analysis, with its revelation of Isabel's shining beneficient Emersonianism:

> Every now and then Isabel found out she was wrong, and then she treated herself to a week of passionate humility. After that she held her head higher than ever; for it was of no use, she had an unquenchable desire to think well of herself. She had a theory that it was only on this condition that life was worth living: that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization . . . *should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration fully chronic. It was almost as unnecessary to cultivate doubt of oneself as to cultivate doubt of one's best friend.* . . . The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a good many tricks. She spent half her time in thinking of beauty, and bravery, and magnanimity; *she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action; she thought it would be detestable to be afraid or ashamed.* (Italics not in the original.)

Still more revealing is the exchange between Isabel and the thoroughly Europeanised Madame Merle on the subject of the individual's capacity for self-assertion in the face of outward circumstances:

> Madame Merle: "When you have lived as long as I, you will see that every human being has his shell, that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of of circumstances. There is no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of a cluster of circumstances. What do you call one's self? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to me—and then it flows back again. I know that a large part of myself is in the dresses I choose to wear. I have a great respect for *things!*"
>
> Isabel: "I don't agree with you. . . . I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is a measure of me; on the contrary, it's a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one."*

*Note the close parallel between Isabel's reply to Madame Merle and the Emersonian text. "You think me the child of my circumstances: I make my circumstances. Let any thought or motive of mine be different from what they are, the difference will transform my condition and economy. . . . You call it the power of circumstance, but it is the power of me" (*The Transcendentalist*).

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In *The Portrait* James is still hesitating between the attitude of Madame Merle and that of Isabel, and his irony is provoked by the excessive claims advanced by both sides. But in years to come he is to be drawn more and more to the "European" idea of the human self, his finer discriminations being increasingly engaged by the "envelope of circumstances" in which it is contained.

Isabel is above all a young lady of principles, and her most intimate decisions are ruled by them. In refusing the proposal of the grandiose Lord Warburton, she wonders what ideal aspiration or design upon fate or conception of happiness prompts her to renounce such a chance for glamor and worldly satisfaction. Never had she seen a "personage" before, as there were none in her native land; of marriage she had been accustomed to think solely in terms of character—"of what one likes in a gentleman's mind and in his talk . . . hitherto her visions of a completed life had concerned themselves largely with moral images—things as to which the question would be whether they pleased her soul." But if an aristocratic marriage is not to Isabel's liking, neither is the strictly hometown alternative of marrying a business man. The exemplary Gaspar Goodwood, who owns a cotton-mill and is the embodiment of patriotic virtue, likewise fails to win her consent.—"His jaw was too square and grim, and his figure too straight and stiff; these things suggested a want of easy adaptability to some of the occasions of life."

Isabel having so far lacked the requisite fortune to back up her assumption of the role of the heiress, her cousin Ralph provides what is wanting by persuading his dying father to leave her a large sum of money. "I should like to make her rich," Ralph declares. "What do you mean by rich?" "I call people rich when they are able to gratify their imagination." Thus Isabel enters the uppermost circle of her author's hierarchy, the circle of those favored few who, unhampered by any material coercion, are at once free to make what they can of themselves and to accept the fullest moral responsibility for what happens to them in consequence. Now the stage is set for the essential Jamesian drama of free choice. In this novel, however, the transcendent worth of such freedom is not yet taken for granted as it is in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl.* There is the inter-

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vention, for instance, of the lady-correspondent Henrietta Stackpole, who is no passionate pilgrim but the mouthpiece, rather, of popular Americanism. It is she who questions Isabel's future on the ground that her money will work against her by bolstering her romantic inclinations. Henrietta is little more than a fictional convenience used to furnish the story with comic relief; but at this juncture of the plot she becomes the agent of a profound criticism aimed, in the last analysis, at James himself, at his own tendency to romanticise the values to which privilege lays claim. And what Henrietta has to say is scarcely in keeping with her habitual manner of the prancing female journalist. Characteristically enough, she begins by remarking that she has no fear of Isabel turning into a sensual woman; the peril she fears is of a different nature:

> "The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams—you are not enough in contact with reality—with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say, sinning world that surrounds you. You are too fastidious, you have too many graceful illusions. Your newly-acquired thousands will shut you up more and more in the society of selfish and heartless people, who will be interested in keeping up those illusions. . . . You think, furthermore, that you can lead a romantic life, that you can live by pleasing others and pleasing yourself. You will find you are mistaken. Whatever life you lead, you must put your soul into it—to make any sort of success of it; and from the moment you do that it ceases to be romance, I assure you; it becomes reality! . . . you think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views—that is your great illusion, my dear."

The case against the snobbish disposition of the Jamesian culture-seekers and their over-estimation of the worldly motive has seldom been so shrewdly and clearly stated. But Isabel is not especially vulnerable to criticism of this sort. It is only in her later incarnations that the heiress succumbs more and more to precisely the illusions of which Henrietta gives warning—so much so that in the end, when Maggie Verver appears on the scene, the life she leads may be designated, from the standpoint of the purely social analyst, as a romance of bourgeois materialism, the American romance of newly-gotten wealth divesting itself of its plebeian origins in an ecstasy of refinement!

Henrietta's words, moreover, are meant to prefigure the tragedy of Isabel's marriage to Gilbert Osmond, an Italianate

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American, virtually a European, whom she takes to be what he is not—a decent compromise between the moral notions of her American background and the glamor of the European foreground. Osmond, whose special line is a dread of vulgarity, employs a kind of sincere cunning in presenting himself to Isabel as the most fastidious gentleman living, concerned above all with making his life a work of art and resolved, since he could never hope to attain the status he actually deserved, "not to go in for honors." The courtship takes place in Rome and in Florence, where Isabel is swayed by her impression of Osmond as a "quiet, clever, distinguished man, strolling on a moss-grown terrace above the sweet Val d'Arna . . . the picture was not brilliant, but she liked its lowness of tone, and the atmosphere of summer twilight that pervaded it. . . . It seemed to speak of a serious choice, a choice between things of a shallow and things of a deep interest; of a lonely, studious life in a lovely land." But the impression is false. Only when it is too late does she learn that he had married her for her money with the connivance of Madame Merle, his former mistress, who had undertaken to influence her in his behalf. This entrapment of Isabel illustrates a recurrent formula of James's fiction. The person springing the trap is almost invariably driven by mercenary motives, and, like Osmond, is capable of accomplishing his aim by simulating a sympathy and understanding that fascinate the victim and render her (or him) powerless.* Osmond still retains some features of the old-fashioned villain, but his successors are gradually freed from the encumbrances of melodrama. Merton Densher (*The Wings of the Dove*) and Prince Amerigo (*The Golden Bowl*) are men of grace and intelligence, whose wicked behavior is primarily determined by the situation in which they find themselves.

Osmond reacts to the Emersonian strain in Isabel as to a personal offence. He accuses her of wilfully rejecting traditional values and of harboring sentiments "worthy of a radical newspaper or a Unitarian preacher." And she, on her part, discovers that his fastidiousness reduced itself to a "sovereign contempt

*It seems to me that this brand of evil has much in common with the "unpardonable sin" by which Hawthorne was haunted—the sin of *using* other people, of "violating the sanctity of a human heart." Chillingsworth in *The Scarlet Letter* is essentially this type of sinner, and so is Miriam's model in *The Marble Faun*. In James, however, the evil characters have none of the Gothic *mystique* which is to be found in Hawthorne. Their motives are transparent.

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for every one but some or three or four exalted people whom he envied, and for everything but half-a-dozen ideas of his own . . . he pointed out to her so much of the baseness and shabbiness of life . . . but this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it forever in one's eye, in order, not to enlighten, or convert, or redeem, but to extract from it some recognition of one's superiority." Isabel's notion of the aristocratic life is "simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty," whereas for Osmond it is altogether a "thing of forms," an attitude of conscious calculation. His esteem for tradition is boundless; if one was so unfortunate as not to be born to an illustrious tradition, then "one must immediately proceed to make it."* A sense of darkness and suffocation takes hold of Isabel as her husband's rigid system closes in on her. She believes that there can be no release from the bondage into which she had fallen and that only through heroic suffering is its evil to be redeemed. On this tragic note the story ends.

Yet the heiress is not to be turned aside from her quest by such inevitable encounters with the old evils of history. On the lighted stage the bridegroom still awaits his new-world bride.

In few of his full-length novels is James so consummately in control of his method of composition as in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl.* It is a method all scenic and dramatic, of an "exquisite economy" in the architectural placing of incidents, which eliminates any "going behind or telling about the figures" save as they themselves accomplish it. Indulgence in mere statement is banned; the motto is: *represent, convert,*

*The significance of Osmond's character has generally been underrated by the critics of James. For quite apart from his more personal traits (such as his depravity, which is a purely novelistic element), he is important as a cultural type in whom the logic of "traditionalism" is developed to its furthest limits. As a national group the American intellectuals suffer from a sense of inferiority toward the past, and this residue of "colonial" feeling is also to be detected in those among them who raise the banner of tradition. It is shown in their one-sided conformity to the idea of tradition, in their readiness to inflate the meanings that may be derived from it. Their tendency is to take literally what their European counterparts are likely to take metaphorically and imaginatively. My idea is that James tried to overcome this bias which he suspected in himself by objectifying it in the portrait of Osmond. To this day, however, the shadow of Gilbert Osmond falls on many a page of American writing whose author—whether critic, learned poet, or academic "humanist"—presents himself, with all the exaggerated zeal and solemnity of a belated convert, as a spokesman of tradition.

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dramatise. By means of this compositional economy the story is so organised that it seems to tell itself, excluding all material not directly bearing on the theme. This despite the "complication of innuendo and associative reference," as William James called it, by which the author communicates the vital information needed to understand the action. Complications of this sort so confuse some readers that they see nothing but surplus-matter and digression where, in fact, everything is arranged in the most compact order. Nor is the occasional wordiness and vagueness of James's prose germane to our judgment of his novelistic structure. Even the thoughts of his characters are reproduced along exclusive rather than inclusive lines, as in *The Golden Bowl,* where the interior monologues of Maggie and the Prince are in reality a kind of speech which no one happens to overhear, showing none of the rich incoherence, haphazardness, and latitude of Joyce's rendering of the private mind, for example.

The principle of free association is incompatible with the Jamesian technique, which is above all a technique of exclusion. One can best describe it, it seems to me, as the fictional equivalent of the poetic modes evolved by modern poets seeking to produce a "pure poetry." In this sense the later James has more in common with a poet like Mallarmé than with novelists like Joyce and Proust, whose tendency is to appropriate more and more material and to assimilate to their medium even such non-fictional forms as the poem and the essay. In Proust the specific experience is made use of to launch all sorts of generalisations, to support, that is, his innumerable analyses—by turn poetic and essaystic—of memory, love, jealousy, the nature of art, etc. In Joyce this impulse to generalisation finds other outlets, such as the investing of the specific experience with mythic associations that help us to place it within the pattern of human recurrence and typicality. James tightens where Joyce and Proust loosen the structure of the novel. In their hands the novel takes on encyclopedic dimensions, surrendering its norms and imperialistically extending itself, so to speak, to absorb all literary genres. It might be claimed, in fact, that *the novel as they write it ceases to be itself, having been transformed into a comprehensive work from which none of the resources of literature are excluded.* Not that they abandon the principle of selection; the point is rather that they select

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material to suit their desire for an unrestricted expansion of the medium, whereas James selects with a view to delimiting the medium and defining its proper course. He confirms, as very few novelists do, Goethe's observation that the artistic effect requires a closed space. It is true that at bottom it is culture and the history of culture which constitute the inner theme of all three writers, but while Joyce and Proust express it by continually revealing its universality, James expresses it by limiting himself, through an extraordinary effort of esthetic calculation, to its particularity.

One need not go so far as to say that the formal character of the Jamesian novel is determined by its social character in order to emphasise the close relation between the two. Both manifest the same qualities of particularity and exclusiveness. But why, it might be asked, is Proust's work so different in form, given the fact that he, too, is drawn by the resplendent image of the "great world" and, presumably, is quite as responsive to some of the values attributed to James? The answer would be that even on this ground the American and the French novelist are more at variance than would seem at first glance.

Proust's picture of society contains elements of lyricism as well as elements of objective analysis. He is a more realistic painter of social manners than James, perhaps for the reason that he permits no ethical issues to intervene between him and the subject, approaching the world *ab initio* with the tacit assumption that ethics are irrelevant to its functions. By comparison James is a traditional moralist whose insight into experience turns on his judgment of conduct. If sometimes we are made to feel that he is witholding judgment or judging wrongly, that may be because he is either conforming, or appears to conform, to certain moral conventions of the world's making by which it manages to flatter itself. In Proust such conventions are brought out into the open, but not for purposes of moral judgment. The sole morality of which the protagonist of his novel is conscious grows out of the choice he faces between two contrary ideals. He must decide whether to pursue the art of life or the life of art, and the novel can be said to be an epical autobiography of his effort to come to a decision. But it is not until the end-volume that the world is finally renounced; and through a kind of optical illusion in-

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duced by the novel's astonishing unfoldment, we seem to participate in this renunciation of the world at the precise moment when its alternative—*i.e.* the work of art—actually comes into being, or, more accurately, is at last fully realized. Since in this work the world is overcome only after it has been possessed, the unity of life and art is affirmed in it despite the author's attempt to divorce them by closing with a purely subjective account of the artistic process. (No matter what Proust intended this account to mean, taken in its context it affects us as an ironic expression of the artist's triumph over his material, a mocking valediction addressed to that recalcitrant angel—the objective spirit of reality —with whom the artist grappled through the long night of creation and, having gotten the better of him, can now treat with disdain.)

But if in Proust art and life are unified by the contradiction between them, in James they are initially combined in his root-idea of experience. His passionate pilgrims, such as the heiress, are driven, despite all vacillations and retractions, by their need to master the world (which is identified with experience and the "real *taste* of life"), and in art they recognize the means by which the world becomes most richly aware of itself. As Americans they have come to it so belatedly that they can ill afford either the spiritual luxury or spiritual desperation of looking beyond it. This is the reason, I think, that except for the early example of *Roderick Hudson*, the theme of art and artists enters significantly and independently only into some of James's short stories, in which he deals not with his representative figures but with his own case as a professional writer somewhat estranged from society by his devotion to his craft. Though these stories testify to the artistic idealism of their author, they can scarcely be taken as a serious challenge to the authority of the world.

Now at this point it should be evident that James's inability to overcome the world, in the sense that most European writers of like caliber overcome it, is due not to his being too much of it, but, paradoxically enough, to his being too little of it. And for that the explanation must be sought in his origins. For he approaches the world with certain *presumptions of piety* that clearly derive from the semi-religious idealism of his family-background and, more generally, from the early traditions and faith of the American community. But in James this idealism

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and faith undergo a radical change, in that they are converted to secular ends. Thus one might venture the speculation that his worldly-esthetic idea of an élite is in some way associated, however remotely and unconsciously, with the ancestral-puritan idea of the elect; hence the ceremoniousness and suggestions of ritual in the social display of a novel like *The Golden Bowl.* So with the ancestral ideas of sin and grace. Is it not possible to claim that the famous Jamesian refinement is a trait in which the vision of an ideal state is preserved—the state of grace to be achieved here and now through mundane and esthetic means? It is the vision by which Milly Theale is transported as she rests in her Venetian garden—the vision of "never going down, of remaining aloft in the divine dustless air, where she could but hear the plash of water against the stone." And through the same process, as I have already had occasion to remark, the fear of sin is translated in James into a revulsion, an exasperated feeling, almost morbid in its sensitiveness, against any conceivable crudity of scene or crudity of conduct.*

Yet whatever the sources and implications of the social legend in James, I have no doubt that it enabled him as nothing else could to formulate his creative method and to remain true, even on his lower levels, to the essential mood and sympathy of his genius. There is an essay on Proust by Paul Valéry in which he speaks of the French novelist's capacity "to adapt the potentialities of his inner life" to the aim of expressing "one group of people . . . which calls itself Society," thus converting the picture of an avowedly superficial existence into a profound work. But I have always felt that what Valéry is saying in this essay could more appropriately be said about the later James than about Proust. —

> The group which calls itself Society is composed of symbolic figures. Each of its members represents some abstraction. It is necessary that all the powers of this world should somewhere meet together; that *money* should converse with *beauty*, and *politics* become familiar with *elegance;* that *letters* and *birth* grow friendly and serve each other tea. . . . Just as a banknote is only a slip of paper, so the member of society is a sort of fiduciary money made of living flesh. This combination is extremely favorable to the designs of a subtle novelist.
>
> . . . very great art, which is the art of simplified figures and the most pure types; in other words, of essences which permit

*Cf. *Attitudes to Henry James,* The New Republic, February 15, 1943.

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> the symmetrical and almost musical development of the consequences arising from a carefully isolated situation—such art involves the existence of a conventional milieu, where the language is adorned with veils and provided with limits, where *seeming* commands *being* and where *being* is held in a noble restraint which changes all of life into an opportunity to exercise presence of mind. (*A Tribute*)

This is, however, a peculiarly one-sided view of the Proustian scene, as Valéry allows himself to be carried away by the comparison between the old French literature of the Court and *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu.* Proust balances his poetic appreciation of the Guermantes way with a more than sufficient realism in portraying the rages of Charlus, the passions of Saint-Loup, the schemes of Mme. Verdurin, Bloch, Morel, Jupien, etc.; nor is he averse to showing the pathological condition of that "group which calls itself Society"; he, too, is infected, after all, with the modern taste for excess, for speaking out with inordinate candor. The truth is that it is in James, rather than in Proust, that we often find it difficult to make certain of the real contours of *being* behind the smooth mask of *seeming.* It is *his* language which is "adorned with veils and provided with limits," and it is the conversation of *his* characters which is so allusive that it seems more to spare than to release the sense.

And Valéry continues: "After a new power has gained recognition, no great time passes before its representatives appear at the gatherings of society; and the movement of history is pretty well summarized by the successive admissions of different social types to the salons, hunts, marriages, and funerals of the supreme tribe of a nation." What an apt description of the rise of the heiress—of, say, Milly Theale entering a London drawing-room and being greeted by Lord Mark as the first young woman of her time, or of Maggie Verver gravely telling the prince to whom she has just become engaged that he is an object of beauty, a *morceau du musée,* though of course she hasn't the least idea what it would cost her father to acquire him, and that together they shall possess the "world, the beautiful world!"

(*This essay is part of a chapter on Henry James in Mr. Rahv's forthcoming book:* "*The Figure in the Carpet*".)

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Socialism and the Failure of Nerve: An Exchange

1. The Nerve of Sidney Hook

AFTER MACLEISH'S unsuccessful attempt, comes Sidney Hook's attack on the irresponsibles and defeatists. MacLeish amalgamates the courageous, truthful criticism of society by the best writers of the twenties and thirties with social indifference, Hook amalgamates the criticism of war as an imperialist struggle with failure of nerve and religious hysteria. He attacks the anti-war left as Platonists, bohemians, drunkards, lunatics and metaphysical obscurantists, and herds them with reactionary religious thought and the enemies of progress. It is shocking that Hook, who has insisted on intellectual decencies and democratic procedures in politics, should fall to this level, but there are his words in *Partisan Review* for everyone to read. This is one of the minor casualties of the war: Sidney Hook, wounded in the head while stumbling over his own barricade against the Trotskyists.

Let us look into this term, "failure of nerve", which serves him as a blanket name for all that he condemns as reactionary and muddle-headed in contemporary thinking.

In applying it for the first time to the Hellenistic age, Gilbert Murray meant to show that the decline of rationalism was connected with a loss of interest in civic responsibilities and political life. In Hook's articles the failure of nerve is diagnosed in religious and Marxist groups who are most energetic politically. Hook is therefore compelled to distinguish the modern from the ancient failure of nerve by one basic difference: that the modern nervous failures have not withdrawn from political social affairs, although the flight from responsibility remains the essential mark of the failure in general.

But not all the old metaphysicians and supernaturalists were politically passive; witness the Stoics. And on the other side, their materialist, anti-metaphysical opponents, the Epicureans, recommended indifference to politics and social struggles. Broadly speaking, what divides ancient from modern thinking on this matter is that antiquity did not possess a concept of progress, based on the potentialities of science and social development; the surmounting of the miseries of life and man's natural weakness could not be conceived as a rational social activity willed and carried through by men themselves. Hence ancient resignation to evil has another significance and tone, more impersonal, religious and fatalistic, and less disillusioned than modern pessimism, which repudiates

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the promises of progress and is often colored by the pathos of defeated aspirations toward brotherhood and freedom.

Murray makes the point that before the spread of superstition and irrationalism, Greek philosophy was not free from these tendencies. Religion and popular thinking were full of supernatural elements. In the end, he leaves it open whether Christianity, which he represents as in part, at least, an outcome of the "failure of nerve", was not perhaps an advance on the old pagan beliefs. He prefers science, where science is available; but where feeling, imagination and sympathy have to decide a question, some of the moral attitudes born during this period of "failure of nerve", a time of "increased sensitiveness", he calls it, are an indispensable aid. Even the insanities of late paganism and early Christianity have helped to make us sane. There is something to be said for this view, although I do not believe that we owe to Christianity our notions of democracy, freedom and individual rights, or that morality and humane relationships are insecure without religious rites and the belief in God. But it is necessary to speak of this positive side of the so-called "failure of nerve", because the same question may be posed today; to what extent the irrationalist content of contemporary arts, their motifs of anxiety and exasperation, the sympathy with the tormented, suffering, psychotic, primitive, infantile and magical, and the violent hostility to social life, and even to science, include a valid criticism of existing institutions and make us more deeply aware of the inner world of the self. The literature and painting which remain today on the standpoint of a cheerful, sane naturalism appear to us unspeakably shallow. Hook is perfectly right in exposing for the hundredth time since the eighteenth century the illogicalities of religious thought and the reactionary part of the Church in contemporary affairs. This fight has to be carried on as long as religious mystifications and the influence of the Church persist. But what Hook defines as the "failure of nerve" in the beginning of his article is more than the reversion of a few intellectuals to religion; it is the loss of confidence in science and social progress, the profound introversion of philosophy and the arts, and that larger wave of secular irrationalism which he fears may "rot our culture even if Hitler is defeated". But no one who values the great works of art which have arisen on the ground of attitudes of despair and of spiritual resistance to the misery of social life can judge all these manifestations as alike reactionary and valueless. To interpret the situation justly would require another kind of approach than Hook's anti-religious polemic and defense of scientific method.

His purpose, however, is not to examine the "failure of nerve" in the original sense and to uncover its social roots; it is mainly a convenient label with which to discredit opponents to whom the term is not clearly applicable. Where Murray was rather cautious and qualified his judgment of the Hellenistic "failure of nerve" according to the complexities of the evidence, Hook tends to a willful, sweeping inclusiveness and claps this unsavory rubric on practically everyone on the left with whom he disagrees politically. By diagnosing them all as failures of nerve, he tries to terrify us into agreement. The ancient "failure of nerve", which was a process of several hundred years, meant the

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decline of Greek society; the new failure, only a few years old, will evidently produce the collapse of Western civilization. By this apocalyptic threat he hopes to win his readers to ideological support of the war.

In his articles it turns out that among those who are hostile to science and look for theological justifications, some, like Niebuhr, show failure of nerve although they share Hook's views about the war and socialism, and others, like the Catholics, who also support the war and are therefore his momentary allies, have not lost their nerve, but under circumstances favorable to their propaganda, have become bolder and more scurrilous in attacking science. He taxes with failure of nerve individuals who have courageously maintained, at the risk of persecution, the same unpopular views about the war that they held before it began. At the same time he is silent about those who have abandoned the camp of socialism for a shallow and palpably false doctrine of a new managerial society. By his strange criteria, the late Leon Trotsky, to whose memory he dedicated his book on "Reason, Social Myths, and Democracy", would be a case of Platonism, lunacy and loss of nerve; but he excepts from the charge of failure "the miscellaneous but very large assortment of individuals who have fallen out of the fight for a better world because they are discouraged or tired or emotionally exhausted by the political failures of the last generation. Some of them have earned a rest . . ." It seems that the only radicals he excuses are the silent ex-radicals.

During the last war the internationalists accused of cowardice and intellectual failure the socialists who had earlier predicted the war as a result of imperialist rivalries, but justified it when it broke out. Hook is in a great hurry to turn the tables on his accusers; according to him, it is they who have lost their nerve, while he emerges as the only scientific and true socialist spirit among them all.

It may be that the writings of the anti-war radicals show traces of metaphysics. Why this should earn for them the stigma of intellectual and moral failure is something I cannot understand. Would Hook bring the same charge against his philosophical colleagues, few of whom are free from metaphysics, for example against Russell, whose logical theories have been characterized as Platonic, or against Dewey, who opposes the method of intelligence to the method of force, as if they were inherently antagonistic, like spirit and matter, good and evil? Beside the faith of certain Marxists in Engels' dialectical laws and the part of theology in Niebuhr's politics, the religious in Roosevelt's pronouncements and policy is immeasurably more important. I have in mind not simply his unfailing invocation of God—he has also declared that the aim of this war is religious—but his more concrete and mysterious relations with the Vatican. We should expect Hook to attack the President as No. 1 in the series of failures of nerve. But no, it is the Trotskyists, Lenin's Witnesses, who are religious and metaphysical nervous cases. The germ of dialectic infects all their arguments. In the case of the bourgeois politicians, however, he only observes "the absence of connection between the pleas for divine guidance . . . and the content of the speeches." Hook will some day recognize the connection: the appeal to God replaces the appeal to understanding, to science and to

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experience. It masks the interests behind the policy, and is no less "a cover for power politics" than the "social consciousness of the churchmen" which Hook takes apart with a ruthless logic.

II

Hook accuses others of having abandoned their positions. The fact is that it is he who has changed, although he has never as much as admitted this. Up to the fall of 1939, he criticized the program of a Popular Front from a Marxist standpoint as leading inevitably to popular support of the coming imperialist war. If he has forgotten this, let him reread his article on Max Lerner in *Partisan Review* in the spring of 1939. There he denounced the Popular Front against fascism as "contradictory and self-defeating", "an invitation to disaster", "a dangerous illusion". "When we remember that war means fascism in full military dress, the arc of Popular Front futility spirals downward to the bloody mire it sought to avoid." "A socialist who supports a Popular Front government may find that as a result of its program of defense of capitalism, it may open the gates to the Fascists who are even more resolute defenders of capitalism." "Every democratic state even under a Popular Front regime has a capitalist economy—basically like Germany." A few months later, in the fall of 1939, he attacked Stalin for having unloosed the imperialist war between Churchill and Hitler. By the summer of 1940, he had discovered that the war was not imperialist, but a defense of the French revolution and of "the great American dream" against the cultural and political counter-revolution of the new managerial order. And now in 1943, the causes of the war have become irrelevant; only the consequences matter. Yet those who have continued to believe what he believed in the spring of 1939 are Platonists, lunatics, bohemians, drunkards and metaphysicians.

A political theorist has the right and the duty to change his mind as often as new facts compel him; we question only his fairness in concealing his changes when he attacks and abuses those whose position he once shared.

But let us consider his new position on its own merits.

It comes down to a pair of alternatives: "If Hitler wins, democratic socialism has no future. If Hitler is defeated, it is by no means *assured* that democratic socialism has a future. But it at least has a chance! It is failure to grasp this simple piece of wisdom which marks the political insanity of infantile leftism".

I must confess that I cannot grasp this simple piece of wisdom. Hook takes it for granted that the regime which Hitler was able to impose on Germany would be successfully imposed on the workers in all the defeated nations, including England, the United States, France, Poland, Holland and Scandinavia. He assumes that Hitler would be able to create the "new order" that he has promised. But the resistance he has met even in small countries governed by his military dictatorship with the help of the local fascists shows how doubtful is his assumption. Wherever he has entered by force of arms, he has called into being a violent struggle against his rule and reawakened among the masses a revolutionary spirit that had been broken during the last decades after

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the defeats by the native governments and the betrayals by the leaders of the left parties.

Contrary to the prophecies made in 1940, the victories of Hitler have not brought about a stable fascist regime in France. If one is to be established finally, it will require the deceptive assurances and backing of the democratic nations. The conquest of France radicalized the French people, revived their political will and prepared them for new struggles. Even if victorious, Hitler cannot organize Europe on a fascist plan. Nor will the victory of the Allies do away with the conditions that made fascism and the war inevitable. Whether the Nazis or the capitalist democracies win, the war will mean the further ruin of Europe and misery to millions of victims. When Hook tells us in his article that capitalism does not wish to solve its problems scientifically, he implies the same thing: that neither the victors nor the vanquished will be able to make a lasting order out of this chaos. The war has aggravated everywhere the conflicts of the pre-war period and made clearer than before the inhuman, destructive, chaotic character of the existing order. Neither Hitler nor Churchill nor Roosevelt has any illusions about the stability of capitalism in Europe and the colonies, no matter who wins the war, it is of the utmost urgency for them to forestall or divert any reawakening of the workers to independent action. Reactionaries throughout Europe are forced to speak in the name of socialism, or at least against capitalism, if they wish to attract the masses.

Hook is able to arrive at his "simple piece of wisdom" only by abstracting the war from its causes and consequences. How the world will be redivided by the victors, how the war will affect economic relations, the imperialist rivalries and the movements for socialism and colonial freedom, on all this he is silent. He attacks liberals for assuming that an Allied victory will solve all problems by reminding them that the conflicts of interest between nations and classes will continue after the war, but he ignores the fact that they continue during the war and are transformed in violence by the war itself.

His reasoning is essentially no different from Kautsky's in support of the Kaiser in 1914. Kautsky argued then that a victory of the Czar would mean the crushing of the German labor movement, the most advanced toward socialism in Europe, while the Czar's defeat would help to bring about a revolution in Russia. In spite of Kautsky's good will to the Russian revolution and the correctness of his prediction about the internal effects of the Czar's defeat, Lenin denounced his arguments as a betrayal of socialism, and I believe that Hook shares this opinion. Neither Lenin nor Kautsky could foresee in 1914 the military outcome of the war, but Lenin alone was right in predicting from the beginning that the war would not resolve the conflicts that had caused it, but would make them more acute than ever, that it would bring immense misery to the people of the whole European continent, and that its chief results would be revolutionary convulsions and a redivision of the world in favor of the victorious powers. He was able to reach these judgments of the consequences of the war because of his theory of its causes, even though the latter did not enable him to prevent the war or to anticipate the military outcome. And he defined it as the whole duty of a socialist

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leader under these conditions to expose the nature of the war and to prepare the masses for the revolutionary crises that would surely follow. But Hook, as I have said, considers the question of the causes of the war irrelevant to both its nature and consequences; he converts this question into one about "responsibility", which he answers frivolously and vaguely by saying: "of course, in varying degrees, everybody", an answer that we must take as a sample of his scientific approach to politics. Yet in replying to a critic in the last *Partisan Review*, he asserts that "the 'truth' of value judgments is to be determined by . . . scientific analyses of their causes and consequences in relation to the specific problems of evaluation". He is certainly aware of these causes and consequences and he knows enough to fear the outcome of even an Allied victory, but he does not wish to face them directly or to think them through, as some one who speaks so insistently about scientific politics has the responsibility to do, and as was done by the internationalists during the last war. They emerge here and there in his argument in a veiled form and give to his article about the policies of the left its incongruous, eclectic character. Instead of considering openly the consequences of Allied victory for the peoples in the defeated countries, for the colonial races, for the new relations of American and British imperialism on the five continents, he speaks in the most general terms of the continuation of the pre-war conflicts after the war, without suggesting the new turbulent situation and the problems created by the war itself. And he proposes for the guidance of American labor toward the achievement of socialism a party more patriotic than the American Legion to mobilize the masses for a more efficient conduct of the war, and to fight for civil liberties and for safeguards against the abuse of administrative powers.

While urging the workers to support the war actively, which means support of the government, he warns them against Roosevelt's (and even more, Wallace's) reactionary trend. He wants the war to be fought in a "total" democratic fashion, although "total democracy" is possible only in a peaceful socialist society. He wants the workers to take the leadership of the war out of the hands of the capitalists in order to guarantee both the military victory and the peace, although this is inconceivable without a revolution, and he thinks that under present conditions a revolution would be absurd and incompatible with resistance to Hitler. What his proposal comes to in short is a new Popular Front in which labor would have some representation in the management of the war, but not "entire responsibility", as if partial responsibility would save labor from the effects of such collaboration in the past, the "disastrous" effects which Hook has traced in his article in *Partisan Review* in 1939 and predicted for similar schemes in the future.

Since he has discredited the Popular Front as a pattern of collaboration, he has to look for precedents elsewhere, and he finds one in the "Clemenceau thesis". It may be shocking to some readers that Hook should compare with Clemenceau's program a manoeuver of a party that he defines as an independent socialist labor party, in contrast to the opportunist labor parties that we know. Clemenceau belonged politically to the capitalist class, no less than Lloyd George, who attacked the in-

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efficiency of his government during the last war; and his management of the war required no fundamental break with the interests of the ruling group or change in their war aims. But the Clemenceau thesis is an excellent counterpart of Hook's whole political program, which contains nothing of specifically working-class demands. He openly discourages the workers from pressing their economic demands, which are the elementary grounds of class resistance and defense. ("Today the great labor organizations and their political allies, instead of concentrating mainly on time and a half for all overtime over forty hours and similar measures, ought to build an independent political bloc, outside of the major existing parties".) His program for this labor party, which he also calls the "progressive bloc", is even less radical than the Popular Front in its exclusion of economic demands. This war-time Labor Party is completely indifferent to the immense burden of taxation and high prices that falls mainly on the workers. It has nothing to say about the treatment of Negroes. In the light of this pretension to a genuinely socialist workers program, it is ludicrous to read that his new party is to be founded on class interests. "If it was unintelligent to believe, as it was, that politics is *only* an expression of conflicting class interests, for in every civilized community there are some interests that are common, it is just as unintelligent to believe that it can be understood without assigning to class interests great weight." The weight that Hook assigns to the interests of the American working class may be gauged from the program of his labor party.

The question of political support of the war by the left parties is at this date of no practical significance for the military outcome. But the analysis of the causes and consequences is vitally important for guiding the masses in the political crises that are bound to arise from the war here and abroad. The program of Hook, which ignores the causes of the war, which commits a labor party to the primary function of ensuring the military efficiency of the war, which subordinates to this end the economic interests of the workers, which attacks the incompetence of the government but conceals its imperialist designs, must in the long run weaken the movement for socialism. How can a "progressive bloc" with the patriotic program outlined by Hook change overnight at the end of the war into a party capable of uncompromising struggle and lead the masses to political power against all the bait and psuedo-socialist promises of the bourgeois parties? I shall quote Hook himself on this point: "a socialist and labor movement which ideologically disarms itself when it cooperates with its opponents for a specific task, may find itself terribly disadvantaged after a purely military victory. What is worse, it may find the world in such a state that it may become necessary to put down another Hitler in twenty years." I believe that his conception of the war and his program for a labor party are just such a psychological disarmament, to say the least. In the future, as in the past, the real leaders of socialism will be those who have firmly and repeatedly told the truth about the nature of the war and have fought for the economic needs of the workers and thereby prepared them for the struggles that will come.

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III

Throughout his two articles Hook opposes to religion and metaphysics the more reliable methods of science and the assumptions of philosophical naturalism. Insofar as he is refuting the claims of theologians and supernaturalists, these are indispensable alternatives and criteria. But when it comes to practical economic and political questions, it is misleading to speak of scientific method and naturalism as the distinctive grounds of a solution. They are only general conditions which may hold for entirely opposed views in these fields. (The insistence on method is sometimes a blind for the lack of theory or the hostility to new results. That is how radical achievements in the sciences have been attacked in the past.) Whoever calls for a scientific and naturalistic approach to society as something new, whoever says, like Dewey, that in moral and social matters we are "twenty-five hundred years behind Hippocrates", implies that nothing useful is known about them and that a scientific theory has yet to be constructed. But Hook would have us believe at the same time that his own espousal of socialism and his conception of a labor party rest upon a scientific analysis of capitalist society and upon an already established theory that permits a long range view of things and insight into hidden factors and trends. But it is not even true, as he maintains, that scientific method has never been applied to economic, political and social affairs by the capitalist rulers. Without overestimating the genius of our statesmen, it may be said that within the framework of his own system an intelligent politician uses the relevant information available, studies his objects, finds the most effective means for his goals, presses into service the instruments of propaganda, organization, engineering and psychological control, with the help of competent technicians. He cannot prevent economic crises and wars, any more than the weather bureau can prevent storms, but he knows how to use them for his immediate advantage. To say that "drift and improvisation have been the rule" is to propagate illusions about the innocence and helplessness of the capitalist leaders. Churchill, according to Hook, is "satisfied merely [!] with winning the war". Hook writes as if the capitalist state could meet the "challenge of poverty, unemployment, distribution of raw materials, the impact of technology", if it would only repress certain selfish obstructing individuals. But to criticize capitalism for not scientifically abolishing economic crises is to criticize it for not committing suicide.

The difficulties of the socialist movement lie not so much in the realm of general theory, as in its application. To win power the labor movement has to overcome a greater resistance with weaker means than any bourgeois political group. The victory of fascism has been supported everywhere by those who already hold the economic and military forces. In proposing that we first discover a scientific theory, Hook hides the fact that such a theory already exists and has existed for over a hundred years, and that he himself has expounded it many times and has traced its emergence.

He goes still further. He defines science in such a way that a scientific political theory and program become impossible for the working class. In refuting the enemies of scientific method and especially those

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who place feeling above science, he speaks of science as the only discipline with "truths about existence that command the universal assent of all investigators". This criterion of universal assent rules out the possibility of a revolutionary social science. Of course, one could obtain such assent for harmless conclusions about all sorts of interesting social phenomena which are not directly involved in class conflict. It is inconceivable that all investigators accept the findings on which the proposals for socialism are based. It is inconceivable that more than a few of them support Mr. Hook's arguments for a new labor party, even if these arguments were well-founded. He has either to admit that where irreconcilably conflicting interests exist no scientific program is possible, or to assert that in such cases each group tries to achieve its purpose by the most effective means consistent with its goals, and to show that the aims of labor are compatible with the life-needs of the overwhelming majority of mankind today and will ultimately reduce human conflicts, while the purposes of the ruling class can be realized only by the increasing frustration of these needs and misery of mankind. But the line between the two groups would then be sharply drawn. It would be utopian to propose under such circumstances, as Dewey does in his article in *Partisan Review*, that we all get together and work out a common scientific plan for solving our problems: "The problem of attaining mutual understanding and a reasonable degree of amicable cooperation among different peoples, races, classes, is bound up with the problem of reaching by peaceful and democratic means some workable adjustment of the values, standards, and ends which are now in a state of conflict". The lambs have nothing to gain from such seminars with the wolves, but the wolves have every reason to encourage such hopes.

This statement of Hook's about "universal assent" is no mere slip due to his enthusiasm for the imposing victories of physics. For he definitely excludes Marxism, as a scientific theory when he writes in the same article: "Every vested interest in social life, every inequitable privilege, every 'truth' promulgated as a national, class or racial truth, denies the competence of scientific inquiry to evaluate its claims". He knows very well that Marxism has for generations claimed to be a class science (cf. his own reference to "Marx's insight that in a class society all social sciences are class sciences"—*From Hegel to Marx*, 1936, pp. 28, 59, 60), and that Marxism has not denied the competence of scientific inquiry to investigate its claims. By lumping together as unscientific all doctrines arising from special interests, as if Nazi racialism, bourgeois economics and socialist theory were alike in this respect, he disregards the most essential point, that not all group values necessarily rest on falsehood and that the interests of some groups are more humane and progressive. But Hook rules out the relevance of science to these differences of value. In replying to a critic in the same issue of P. R., he tells us that "Science is not concerned with making either better men or more efficient men", and that it is therefore wrong to criticize contemporary scientists for their helplessness before ethical, esthetic and social questions. I must differ from him on this point, not as a matter of opinion as to what should be, but as a matter of fact: there are also non-political sciences which are concerned with making better and more efficient men: medicine, psy-

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chology, the engineering sciences, pedagogy, even the criticism of the arts, which has more of science in it than its practitioners have been willing to admit, these are all directed to making better men, and have contributed to our ideas of what is the good individual.

The fact that scientific method in psychology and the social fields may also be applied for fascist and counter-revolutionary ends, and that a naturalist view of man, as free from religion and metaphysics as the most advanced scientific thinking of the time, is compatible with reactionary politics and oppression, should keep us from this empty veneration of method. Even religious and irrational racial beliefs may be propagated from above as "natural" means of befuddling people and holding them in line. After all, hypnotism is also a scientific technique. Some materialists of the eighteenth century approved of religion for the people as an effective instrument of control. Comte, the founder of positivism, supported the dictatorship of Louis Napoleon as a step toward the fulfillment of his thought, and designed a future society ruled scientifically by an oligarchy of bankers and experts. One of the leading parties of reaction in France, the Action Francaise, includes a positivist, unreligious wing, nourished by the political writings of Renan and Taine, enthusiasts of science and great protagonists of scientific method in the study of religions and the arts. To insist therefore, as Hook does, on scientific methods in politics, in abstraction from class values (in contradiction, we must note, of Hook's earlier writings), and according to the criteria of universal assent, is to confuse the real issues and to conceal from his readers the accomplishments of socialist thought.

Nor can we agree with Dewey that it is anti-naturalism that has prevented "the application of scientific methods in the whole field of human and social subject-matter". This is the liberal counterpart of the reactionary view that the present conflicts are due to the naturalistic philosophies.

The choice today is not between supernaturalism and naturalism, irrationality and science. It is between the socialist program and the half dozen schemes which are more or less naturalistic and scientific in their economic and political calculations, but are designed to maintain the present system with all its cruelties and chaos. The greatest enemy is not the metaphysician or the priest, dangerous as he may be, but the armed class opponent who uses the resources of science for his own ends.

DAVID MERIAN

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11. The Politics of Wonderland

Stripped of irrelevancies, the fundamental issue between Merian and me is whether democratic socialists should support the war against Hitlerism. He believes they should not; that Roosevelt and Hitler are equally "armed class opponents" of the labor movement; that it makes relatively little difference which side wins the war, for capitalism will break down in any event; and that a revolutionary upsurge will inevitably carry the masses to socialist victory even if the Axis is triumphant. This is plain foolishness and no gaudy ideological ribbons can conceal it.

Merian's position is a revival on the international field of the old Stalinist line in Germany: "Nach Hitler, kommer Wir." ("After Hitler, comes our turn.") This view likewise held that neither democratic nor fascist Germany could solve the problems of capitalism; that Hitler's regime would necessarily fall like Stresseman's and Bruening's; and that the labor movement would come into its own. Everybody knows what happened. One may doubt whether Hitler stabilized German economy; there can be no doubt of what he did to the labor and socialist movement. One may doubt whether Hitler can stabilize European economy if he wins; but there can be no doubt of what will happen to the European labor and socialist movement. To believe that it must spring up again after Hitler consolidates his military victory is to believe in a mystical automatism foreign both to intelligent Marxist theory and common sense.

The only shred of evidence Merian offers in denying my thesis ("If Hitler wins, democratic socialism has no future; if he is defeated, it at least has a chance"), testifies eloquently against his own. He points to the resistance Hitler is now meeting in the countries he has overrun. But he is blind to the obvious facts that this resistance is *nationalist*, not socialist; that it is supported by the *military* war against Hitler waged by the democracies—a war Merian refuses to support; and that such resistance will be smashed if Hitler is victorious. Is it not significant that the most serious opposition to Hitler manifested itself after his African defeat? If Merian welcomes this opposition to Hitler, should he not support the effort to insure a final military defeat for Hitler which will unleash revolutions against him throughout Europe?

A Fascist victory, on the other hand, will be followed by Fascist governments in all countries of the world. This will make practically certain the liquidation of the labor and socialist movement in our time because of (1) the development of modern instruments of repression (2) the new use of hunger as a weapon of intimidation and control, and (3) total monopoly of economic, cultural and educational agencies in the hands of the Fascist state which will crush the older generation of democrats and wean the young generation away from all democratic traditions. Merian consoles himself that Fascists will have to employ the *word* "socialism" to make their rule palatable. By this token the

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workers have already won a great victory in Germany and Italy! What would the victims of Fascist terror think of this piece of fatuity?

The war is far from won. On Merian's view, if the Fascists were to invade England or America the labor movement should refuse to support the military war against them—not until it had overthrown its own democratic capitalist governments *first.* I submit that from a democratic socialist point of view this is sheer political infantilism—surprising even from a Trotskyist. Consider the present status and rights of American and English labor, not to speak of other sections of the population, hampered and restricted though they are by war conditions. Compare them with what their fate would be under foreign or domestic *Fuehrers.* Look at Germany. Look at France. If Merian were a pacifist, we could understand his indifference to all political realities. But he fancies himself a scientific Marxist. In actuality he is a babe in a political wonderland where concepts have no relation to actions and events.

As if to underline his political irresponsibility, he writes: "The question of political support of the war by the left parties is at this date of no practical significance for the military outcome." Consider the implications of this sentence. Of course, *David Merian's* personal support of the war has no practical significance, but we are discussing the meaning of his *position,* a position which he believes is valid and which he is urging on the labor movement. And this position certainly has practical consequences! Were the English Labor Party and the labor and socialist movement generally to refuse to support the war against Hitler, military disaster might easily result. In hastily assuring us that his position cannot possibly have any bearing upon the war, Merian is asking us not to take him seriously. If it did have a disastrous effect on the war, Merian apparently would abandon it. In effect he is saying: Don't pay attention to my position. I really don't mean it. The 'armed class opponent', Roosevelt, will save me from Hitler—thank God!—but I don't want to fleck my revolutionary purity by approving the efforts of the labor movement to help Roosevelt save itself and me from Fascist terror." His whole attitude is a pose, an academic pose in a red ivory tower which others are keeping safe for him.

2. I am taxed with having concealed changes in my views. Yet all of the views discussed were publicly stated in the pages of *Partisan Review.* The charge that I now accept the position of the Popular Front which I earlier criticized shows that Merian does not understand the difference between a Popular Front, a United Front, and a National Front. In the article from which he cites I maintained that Socialist Parties should not enter the government allied in a common program with capitalist parties but should unite with them on *specific* issues against the Fascist danger. Nor do I today believe that the English Labor Party, for example, should be in the government although giving it unqualified military support in the war against Fascism. But I am prepared to modify my position—on one condition. If the military defeat of Hitler could be encompassed *only* by an alliance between socialist and democratic capitalist parties, I would favor it despite the risks. Like all sectarian intransigeants, Merian does not understand that the consequences of failure to adopt a correct position in time are sometimes

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such that a new situation results in which what was formerly correct is no longer so.

A man who doesn't use the medicine prescribed for him may become very ill; if he rushes to take it in his weakened condition it may kill him. He needs a new, perhaps a more bitter medicine. The failure of the socialist and labor movement in 1914 to live up to the resolutions of the Basle Congress narrowed and worsened the subsequent alternatives it faced. Its failure to prevent the rise of Hitler to power, which was not inevitable, created a situation in which the means that would once have been able to stop him are no longer valid. New means must now be found to insure at least the survival of the socialist movement. I briefly outlined one course. What other practicable alternative is there? Merian offers us faith, hope and prayer in words drawn from third-period Stalinism set to a Trotskyist chant. "The difficulties of the socialist movement", he tells us, "lie not so much in the realm of theory as in its application." A remarkable theory as Merian interprets it! It is "valid" but it has no successful applications except such as would bury the socialist movement.

3. It is not true that I disregard the causes of the war and consider only its consequences. The latter are relevant in deciding what attitude socialist and labor parties should take towards it. Incidentally, the criterion of consequences is the one Marx himself followed in deciding which wars to support, although he believed that in his time the main causes of *all* of them were rooted in Capitalism. The causes of the war, as I indicated, are relevant to "*how* the war should be fought (in the non-military sector) and the *kind* of peace that should be made." That is why I urged the labor movement, while giving Roosevelt military support, to differentiate itself from him politically and organize an independent Labor Party.

4. Since I was not writing a *complete* program for such a party, I do not see why I had to supply details on specific economic demands, taxes, and prices—which vary from period to period—or on the treatment of Negroes, Jews and other minorities. Nor do I see why I should be called on to discuss James Burnham or the problem of China. As distinct from Merian, I have never attempted to say everything at once. Does Merian mean to imply that I am opposed to the Negroes and to better conditions for the workers? All that is lacking is the phrase "it is no accident that Hook fails to mention . . ." to make his polemical methods comparable to those of the *Daily Worker*. In certain places they are indistinguishable. The passage he quotes as evidence that I "openly discourage the workers from pressing their economic demands" indicates that I was urging the organization of an independent Labor Party not as a *substitute* for economic demands but as an *additional* task, the main *political* task. Nor is the Catholic Church my "momentary ally" any more than the German-American Bund is his. The Moscow Trials should have taught a Trotskyite to avoid the methods of political amalgam. And like every humorless fanatic, he interprets my raillery as an irreverance before historic necessity and as a personal insult to its prophets. No one could infer from his polemic that the incidence of my analysis was directed against uncritical support of Roosevelt by the labor movement.

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5. The one serious problem Merian touches on concerns the sense in which we are to understand the phrase "class truths". Unfortunately, he jumbles everything together. By transposing remarks written in criticism of obscurantists who rely on private intuitions to "prove" statements about the natural world, to contexts in which conflicting values are involved, he produces a misleading impression of my views.

His own remarks reveal an elementary confusion between two things: (1) the "acceptance" of qualified investigators, guided by scientific method, which determines the *validity* of a proposition, and (2) the "acceptance" by the community of a valid proposition. To say that a proposition is valid is to say that *in principle* it can secure the universal agreement of all who abide by scientific method. The fact that certain vested interests in the community refuse to follow the lead of scientific method does not make the proposition to which it leads less valid; it does not make it a "class truth" or a "racial truth". If a scientist proclaims that the evidence he observes through his telescope establishes a certain truth about the heavens, the man whose cosmogony it destroys, may, like certain contemporaries of Galileo, refuse to look through it; he may refuse to participate in the process of inquiry. But if true, the proposition is universally true. Similarly, if Marx's economic predictions are true, they are universally true even if those whose future it reads darkly passionately oppose it. They are not "class truths" even if they are used to further class interests.

The crucial question is whether the same kind of analysis can be made for judgments of value or policy. (Short of a treatise I must state my position dogmatically). As far as the adequacy of means to a given end, obviously. But how about the validity of ends? Are they all on the same footing? If one believes there are ultimate or final ends above criticism, one may speak of personal or class "truths" but the meaning of "truth" is radically different from (1) above. My own belief is that an empirical analysis of the ends affirmed in a concrete, historical situation will show that the judgment "this is an ultimate end" is not strictly true but always instrumental to other ends rooted in certain interests; that the judgment can be tested by its bearing on other ends and by the consequences of the means necessary to achieve it; that these further ends involved can in turn be evaluated as well as the interests and needs out of which they spring; that the method of evaluation, "intelligence" in Dewey's phrase, conforms to the same general pattern of inquiry that holds in determining other truths; and that if we take our problems one at a time, no infinite regress is entailed.

The conclusions of "intelligence", here as elsewhere, if valid, are universally valid. But they may not be universally accepted, it may be necessary to fight for them, because of inability or refusal of certain groups to employ the method of intelligence about ends or values. This refusal corresponds to the unwillingness of an obscurantist to look through a telescope or perform a scientific experiment.

The position I have briefly sketched may be wrong but it shows how grotesquely inaccurate is Merian's claim that I rule out the relevance of scientific method to "differences of values"; and how absurd it is to interpret Dewey's view as counterposing "intelligence" to "force,"

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when force may sometimes be part of the method of intelligence in any concrete situation.*

In the past I did use the term "class truths" for those value-judgments affirmed by scientific socialism which were denied or ignored by those whom it affected adversely. But after observing the use to which the phrase was put by the Stalinists (and "racial truths" by the Nazis) all along the line of knowledge from mathematics to philology, I abandoned it. (Cf. my *Reason, Social Myths and Democracy*, passim.) A more important reason is that the socialist and labor movement cannot succeed if it gives the impression that its program, its values, its truths, are valid only for *one* class in the community. In the deadly opposition it meets, it should not make the task of winning allies from the farmers, intellectuals and middle classes more difficult by suggesting that its triumph means every other group's defeat. Instead of giving the impression that it is making a plea for special privileges, it should present its program as an *objective* solution of concrete problems and conflicts.

6. Space allows only one word. Whether the expression "the new failure of nerve" was appropriate for *all* the political tendencies discussed is an open question. I believe I did less than justice to some elements in the "progressive bloc". But as for Merian's position on the war, the future of socialism, and a program for the labor movement—I submit that it exhibits sickly failure of nerve, social irresponsibility, and absence of concrete political intelligence. His sobriety I take for granted; but with such a set of beliefs, it is a strictly minor virtue.

SIDNEY HOOK

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*"As far as experience and reflection indicate that pacific measures are most likely to be effective, the (experimental) philosophy is pacifist; where the reverse is indicated by the best available knowledge of actual conditions, it is revolutionary . . . The objective precondition of the complete and free use of the method of intelligence is a society in which class interests that recoil from social experimentation are abolished." *Educational Frontier*, N. Y. 1933, ed. by Kilpatrick, pp. 314-17. Dewey's clearest statement of his position is his article "Force and Coercion" in *Int. Jour. Ethics* 1916. Merian is probably misled by the fact that Dewey sometimes uses the word "violence" for unnecessary or unintelligent use of force.

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Within the Private View:

A note on Re-reading the Poetry of Edgar Allen Poe

Horace Gregory

So far as the public is concerned, Edgar Poe is in no need of discovery or revival; anthologists of American literature devote a considerable allotment of their treasured "space" to an adequate representation of his prose or verse; and as if to justify the anthologist's concern for Poe's general reputation, four generations of thoroughly respectable Americans have read his *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* with undiminishing, and perhaps (to judge by the number of popular reprint libraries that list among their titles one or another of his books)—no, certainly, increasing enthusiasm. It can be safely said that the works of Edgar Poe are better known than the poetry of Longfellow or of Whitman or the novels of Hawthorne, Melville and Henry James. In contrast to this picture, only the critical attitude seems ill at ease, and of recent years it has been insisting, though almost in a whisper, that Poe is not to be considered a true poet, that by some sleight of hand or eye or psychic deformity he had tricked us into believing that he was something other than he was.

It is not without reason that critical opinion regards Poe warily, because, as all of us know well—and some of us within the past two decades have learned with grief—matters of taste, aesthetics, morality, religion and politics cannot come to rest, and indeed, remain unsettled by measuring the fluctuations of popular response. In the case of Poe critical objection carries with it a number of highly unpleasant names and it is well to consider a few of them before we go much further. Even the most casual reader of Poe's tales and verse has a word to offer here, and Poe's writings are frequently described as "morbid," "unreal," "un-

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healthy," or "fanciful." Once the spell of Poe's charm is broken, the more attentive and sophisticated reader offers similar objections, and phrases like those of "Romantic Decadence" and "a will toward death" are spoken and repeated. If we ignore the centrifugal powers of Poe's attraction, surely enough *The Fall of the House of Usher* can be made to fit neatly within the bounds of a decidedly unhealthy set of terms—and here even the word, "morbid" would seem to understate the emotions roused by the presence of the lady Madeline of Usher entering the room with blood upon her shroud.

As we reread Poe at his second and third best—and here I am thinking of his vastly overrated poems, *The Raven* and *The Bells,* as well as such pieces in prose as *The Balloon Hoax,* his critical essay, *The Rationale of Verse* and his burlesque, *The Business Man and His Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences,* criticism of his taste becomes progressively more serious. We should confess that Poe dissipated the atmosphere of what he conceived to be his major poem by an attempt at a grim joke, a very parody of the emotion that shocked his readers into attention of all he had to say:

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore.
'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, 'art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the Nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!'
Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore.'

This was the Poe of whom Emerson remarked was "the jingle man," the same Poe who defended his skills and paraded his learning in *The Rationale of Verse.* In his essay (and not unlike our contemporary, Mr. Ezra Pound) he attempted to disarm his enemies, the schoolmasters, by a superior show of pedantry—and this effort as we know too well, was unsuccessful. On this level he contrived *The Bells* and the sensational report, brilliantly written for The New York Sun, of a balloon that had crossed the Atlantic westward in three days and landed on the shores of Charleston, South Carolina. This was by no means a disgraceful second best, the prose was lively and sharp, intelligent and clear.

In viewing Poe's not unremarkable second-best, it is not too

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much to claim, I think, that his critical journalism created a precedent for H. L. Mencken's *Prejudices* which for a brief time in the present century stirred the surfaces of literary criticism in the United States. Perhaps it is of minor interest to observe that both entered literary activity in New York after an earlier career in Baltimore, but it is true that both represented an energetic aspect of southern literary journalism in a strictly urban and (for Poe at least) alien environment. Both writers were tonic to the foreign scene: where Poe was ingenious and inclined to be oversharp and shrewish, Mr. Mencken was bass-toned and brisk, displaying his wares with the arts of a side-show barker. Mr. Mencken's advantages over his antagonists were those of quickness in repartee and the genial gift of a sense of humour; Poe's advantages were perhaps less readily conveyed to the eye and ear, but they included the restless, penetrating love of learning that is so often exhibited by the self-educated man. Both men chose as targets for their satire the dull-witted members of the academic profession; and in Poe's burlesque of the wretched charlatan, The Business Man, one finds the prototype of Mr. Mencken's "booboisie."

As one descends through all the phases of Poe's writing that is less than his best, and these include the complimentary pieces of verse which were written to ladies whose attention he wanted to gain in the latter years of his life, his valentine, his *An Enigma,* his second poem addressed *To Helen* who this time was the fashionable poetess, Mrs. Whitman, it should be said plainly that Poe was more frequently the master of artifice than of art. His conscious skills are all too self-evident as though they were making a desperate reach toward a world of daylight and of sanity. There were moments when he could and did write badly, but in these instances it is as difficult to charge Poe with mediocrity as it is to defend his exhibitions of childishly defective morality and taste. At the very heart of his defects, the preternaturally clear view of childhood fears remains one proof of the "genius" he undoubtedly possessed.

But before we find true glimpses of that genius which Poe claimed as his own, some attention should be given to the histrionic ability with which he presented his more felicitous ventures into literary criticism. There is an air of neatness, of shabby gentility,

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conscious of its white collar and clean cuffs surrounding Poe, a fact which his biographers never fail to notice, which makes its presence felt in his lecture on *The Poetic Principle.* It can be said that the lecture itself resembled a series of delicately timed dramatic entrances and scenes, each bringing to a close its moment of suspense by the recitation of an unfamiliar piece of verse. The small anthology within the lecture was one that suited his own taste and with this preliminary hint of something about to happen, Poe contrived to make the lyrical verses of Shelley, Willis, Longfellow, Bryant, Pinkney, Moore, Hood, Byron, Tennyson and Motherwell sound very like his own. Between the silent pauses of surprise—and perhaps an approving hand-clap from his audience—one almost hears Poe's *apologie pour mon vie*: one listens to his remarks on the critics of *The North American Review,* that "magnanimous cabal" which encircled Boston, "the little Athens" of the mid-nineteenth century, one waits to hear the next entry in the charge of dulness against them and suddenly one catches the name of Coleridge, and one remembers that Poe was among the first in America to read the *Biographia Literaria* with conscious respect, if not the profoundest understanding. From then onward, the lecturer speaks of the "elevation of the soul" and the "excitement of the heart" through the reading of lyric poetry, and though I suspect that Poe's eloquent use of such passionately abstract terms bewildered the ladies and their gentlemen who heard them, I am nearly certain that his utterance flattered their ability to understand and to applaud him. He had charmed them at the opening of his lecture by the promise that he had no design to be either thorough or profound, but before he stepped down from the platform he had pursued an able course against "size" and "bulk" in poetry, and in general, against "the curse of bigness," which even today—and many times within the past twenty years—has found its echoes in criticism of American life.

Though it may seem a wilfull paradox to read any moral implications whatsoever in Poe's critical commentaries, yet something that has the sound and color of literary morality has a voice among them—and it is heard even as he satirises moral judgment of poetic merit in *The Poetic Principle.* In speaking for himself and for the position of the poet in a world where commercial enterprise received an overwhelming share of its own approval and

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material goods, the very world of Philadelphia and New York, the slight, yet piercing moral overtone is felt; and like the shrill cry of a bat, it is all too clear once it has been discerned. Poe's list of mock virtues for the scarcely human creatures who practice diddling in *Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences* include Interest, Perseverance, Ingenuity, Audacity, Nonchalance, Impertinence and Grin; and these virtues are so defined as to clothe some few of the literary figures of Poe's day as well as "the banker *in petto*" or the small merchant. The essay itself is far too highly pitched, too nervous, too grotesque to be entirely convincing, and in reading it one suffers the same chill of rejection that one experiences in viewing the habits of Dean Swift's Yahoos. Yet the mock virtues as Poe stated them reveal an important aspect of his critical intelligence; one begins to share the sight of evil which Baudelaire perceived at the very center of Poe's active imagination, and we quickly recognise that the same intelligence which Poe employed in his burlesques of The Business Man's morality appears in all his comments relating his adventures among the New York literati to his own standards of literary excellence. In *The Mystery of Marie Roget* his experiences in journalism found their reflection in the following passage, which even today requires no further elaboration:

> We should bear in mind that, in general, it is the object of our newspapers rather to create a sensation—to make a point—than to further the cause of truth. The latter end is only pursued when it seems coincident with the former.

And in *The Purloined Letter* it is certainly plain that one object of Poe's satire within the story was and still is human stupidity in the person of the Prefect of Police; one sees the satire rise to a small climax as the Prefect betrays his own mental inactivity by ridiculing poetic insight and intelligence, and if one were to translate the Prefect's indolence into moral terms one would find him the very image of sloth and groundless pride.

One need not labor the point that Poe's critical position was heretical, or that in writing his prose narratives and verse he never failed to follow his own advice. His failures may be obvious enough, failures of taste, proportion and adult responsibility, but with the possible exception of his essay on *The Rationale of Verse*, he is never dull—and it would be a rare phenomenon indeed to

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find a reader who had fallen asleep in the progress of following the plot of one of Poe's tales.

It may be said that many of Poe's objects of satire were unworthy of his skill—but so were Alexander Pope's (and we may quote *The Dunciad* to prove it)—yet how cleverly and with what sound judgment he discriminated in separating literary sheep from goats, herding the first, his "magnanimous cabal" of *The North American Review* into one field, and the latter, those who were subtilely influenced by the mock virtues of diddling into the other:

> The most 'popular,' the most 'successful' writers among us (for a brief period, at least) are ninety-nine times out of a hundred, persons of mere address, perseverance, effrontery—in a word, busy-bodies, toadies, quacks. These people easily succeed in *boring* editors (whose attention is too often entirely engrossed by politics or other 'business' matter) into the admission of favorable notices written or caused to be written by interested parties—or, at least, into the admission of *some* notice where, under ordinary circumstances, no notice would be given at all. In this way ephemeral 'reputations' are manufactured which, for the most part, serve all the purposes designated—that is to say, the putting of money into the purse of the quack and the quack's publisher; for there never was a quack who could be brought to comprehend the value of mere fame. Now, men of genius will not resort to these manoeuvers. . . .

The paradox of Poe's morality as he applied it to the writers of his time may be reread today with little loss of pertinency or freshness; and it is only until we hear him bringing charges of plagiarism against Longfellow that we reencounter the darkened atmosphere in which the figure of Poe is the injured and yet petted child of an indulgent foster mother.

As we return to the prospect of a world that Poe saw in his childhood, and here Mr. Hervey Allen's exhaustive and almost exhausting biography, *Israfel*, has been of greater and more penetrating service than the observations of Poe's latter-day American critics, we rediscover the vividness of his attraction for the common reader. Poe's appeal is to the private world that exists in all of us, the world that E. M. Forster aptly described as the true "Ivory Tower," which has always been the necessary and common refuge of the social human being whenever he seeks self-knowledge and wishes to be alone. Poe intensified the realisation of that necessary refuge by the detailed descriptions of "being cast adrift" in *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, which Mr.

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Edward Shanks shrewdly acknowledges as Poe's spiritual autobiography; and throughout the course of telling that remarkable story, Poe touches depths of psychological reality that have been distorted or ignored by those who have attempted to explain his character by a facile use of Freudian analysis. The same penetration into the private world of human experience may be discerned in the following lines which were posthumously printed in 1875 and have not received the attention they deserve:

From childhood's hour I have not been
As others were; I have not seen
As others saw; I could not bring
My passions from a common spring.
From the same source I have not taken
My sorrow; I could not awaken
My heart to joy at the same tone;
And all I loved, I loved alone.
Then—in my childhood, in the dawn
Of a most stormy life—was drawn
From every depth of good and ill
The mystery which binds me still:
From the torrent, or the fountain,
From the red cliff of the mountain,
From the sun that round me rolled
In its autumn tint of gold,
From the lightning in the sky
As it passed me flying by,
From the thunder and the storm,
And the cloud that took the form
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)
Of a demon in my view.

Aside from the autobiographical nature of the poem, what it has to say touches upon an experience common to self-identity in adolescence, the secret confession that the individual stands alone, victorious perhaps, in feeling himself distinct from all other creatures of God's making, but burdened with the self-love-and-pity of Narcissus. From this last extremity Poe frees himself (and the impressionable reader) by the image of a "demon" in his view; and the "demon" in his excellent ambiguity may be a figure of genius or a sight of evil, but probably signifies the two in one in a single look directed up toward Heaven.

The "demon" is, of course, Poe's close familiar, and his appearance in the poem describes the shifting of the newly awak-

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ened ego from pride of seeming singular and distinct to pride of being among the fallen and outcast angels. This salvation from the fate of the too-beautiful Narcissus is not merely the mutation of a sensibility in Romantic literature, but it exists and endures within all poetry that expresses the fulness and release of youthful emotion; it is the obverse side of the same coin which presents its self-identity to God or to Nature or to an amorphous vision of mankind or to a concept, as Shelley saw it, of Platonic love.

Surely the circumstances of Poe's life nourished and enlarged the internal conviction that he occupied a unique position in the world; and one need go no further than Mr. Allen's able biography to see how profoundly they shaped Poe's sensibilities in his early life. One might almost say that his marriage to Virginia Clemm, including his adoption of Virginia's mother, as his own, was a decision which carried childhood with him into middle-age, and indeed, within two years of his own death. In reading Poe, the childhood visit to England with its sight of Gothic towers and its glimpse of the sea's terrors during the long Atlantic voyage should not be ignored; here one restores fragments of memory which seem to float irresistably to the surfaces of his shorter poems. One sees them in his "ultimate dim Thule," his "bottomless vales and boundless floods," his "Time-eaten towers that tremble not," his "o'er the Past (Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering," and brilliantly, his "one bright island smile." If these memories were brought to consciousness through his readings in the poetry of his day, or reinspired through his experiments in taking drugs, their actual sources and their "sepulchre by the sea" are definitely circumscribed by the first fourteen years of his life.

No poet (and indeed Wordsworth's recollections of childhood seem positively remote compared to these) has expressed the scenes of terror within childhood's fears with more enduring vividness than Poe; Rainer Maria Rilke's *Kindheit* with its "*kleine bleiche Gesicht, das sinkind aus dem Teiche schien*" has, I admit, far more delicacy of perception into the same complex of youthful desires and an adult sense of loss, but Poe holds his own by associating a lack of security which is so often felt and realised by the sensitive and unhappy child with the conviction of being prematurely doomed, of being predestined for madness or for Hell.

In this sense, Poe's position in American literature during

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the first half of the nineteenth century is assuredly singular, and if as critic he performed the same services in opposing dull-witted authority in the United States that 'Lewis Carroll' voiced through Alice's lips during her adventures through wonderland and the looking-glass in Victorian England, his situation as a poet was no less critical, and in the worldly gaze of rival critics no less untenable. Poe, like the then unknown Thomas Lovell Beddoes and not unlike the youthful Longfellow and Tennyson, was a belated arrival on the Romantic scene. In America, Longfellow's relationship to his European contemporaries seemed more tangible, and even more "official" than any claim that Poe might have had to offer: while Longfellow travelled through Germany, Italy and Spain in search of a soul that came to rest at Harvard and received the Smith Professorship in comparative literatures, Poe's contact with the Europe of that day was limited to the reading of British periodicals that drifted through John Allan's commercial importing house in Richmond. As Longfellow's travels increased his reputation as an interpreter of modern Europe to Harvard undergraduates, Poe's reading in European letters—however intensive they were or seemed to be—were broadened only by his duties in editorial offices or by the writing of book reviews. Probably the fact that the latter half of his education was conducted in public tended to diminish what little respect he might have earned among the leaders of Boston's intellectual elite; certainly his disastrous experiences at the University of Virginia and at West Point were not of a nature to excite sympathy or understanding in the benign circle of gifted men who had confessed their allegiance to New England soil and were never weary of acknowledging the debt of their educational heritage to Harvard. Viewed from their perspective, the singularity of Poe's poetry was heightened by its infrequency of classical image and reference; and today as then his glory that was Greece and grandeur that was Rome must be perceived through colors that are stained by the green tides of the city in the sea or the Gothic fire of the Palace Metzengerstein. If at extremely infrequent intervals his classical images seem to shed or to reflect a purer light, it is of Psyche who is out of favor with her lover, or of the sexless, sky-wandering Aphrodite. We may, I think, allow a moment of speculation to enter here, and admit that a probable origin of Poe's angels and feminine deities

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floated in his imagination against the painted and domed ceiling of a church which he visited in early childhood in Richmond, safely escorted by his foster-parents. But for us, it is perhaps more important to realise that his imagination had created its world at an immeasurable distance from the Colonial classicism of Jefferson and of New England. In this particular Poe's relationship to an American culture will always seem extraordinary; for in general, our literary and historical imagination looks backward through the neo-classic eighteenth century to an Athens that never existed on our soil, and when it attempts to gaze into the future, it dimly discerns with growing optimism, the seemingly endless cycles of rebirth. In this climate, or atmosphere, or whatever name we wish to call it, the phenomenon of Edgar Poe is all too likely to appear as an anomaly—and so it does until we remember that its emotional associations are of the secret places of the heart and that they touch the springs of human failure. In this latter view, Poe's lonely figure stands at a not too distant call from the Herman Melville who wrote *Pierre* and the unread *Poems*, and in our day, it is not impossibly remote from the E. A. Robinson who conceived the spiritual isolation of *The Man Who Died Twice*. And perhaps—although it is still too soon to say that a similar critical uneasiness will result—we may yet discover that the exile of Poe in Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York was a shadowy premonition of Ezra Pound's exile in Italy.

In America no poet so widely read as Poe has left behind him so small a number of poems on which to rest the usual vicissitudes of fame. By a generous count and including the fragmentary *Politian*, the youthful and experimental *Al Aaraaf* and *Tamerlane*, the number rises to a scant half hundred. After his second and third best poems have been dismissed the number that remain is incredibly small, but among these few Poe's imagination illuminates a world that has enduring relationship to the myths and Popular Stories of MM. Grimm (which, by the way, had been translated into English with revalatory notes and commentaries in 1823 and in 1826). In *The Sleeper*, and in *Romance* and in *Lenore*, it is as though Poe had reached the same depths of delight and of terror that are perceived where the sun and moon and the night wind speak their warnings, where Rose-Bud sleeps her many years (is it sleep or death?) within an enchanted forest. In Poe's

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verses, no Prince escapes the spell, and the rescuing figure is powerless to disenchant the scene:

Far in the forest, dim and old,
For her may some tall vault unfold
Against whose sounding door she hath thrown,
In childhood, many an idle stone—
Some tomb, which oft hath flung its black
And vampire-winged panels back,
Flutt'ring triumphant o'er the palls
Of her old family funerals.

Poe's enchanted Princesses are of the same ancient lineage that speaks in Van den Machandel-Boom:

Min Moder de mi slacht't
Min Vader de mi att,
Min Swester de Marleeniken
Socht alle mine Beeniken,
Un bindt se in een syden Dook,
Legts unner den Machandel-boom.
Kywitt! Kywitt! ach watt een schon Vagel bin ick!

It is when one is certain that Poe freed himself from the conscious skills that he practiced so diligently in *The Raven* and in *The Bells* that one hears the accents that have assured him of an immortality; in *To One in Paradise,* the vision is restored of what Grimms' soldier saw as he witnessed, wrapped in his cloak of invisibility, the secret places where the twelve dancing Princesses held a midnight festival:

And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams.

To this order of Poe's imagination I also attribute the first of his poems bearing the title *To Helen* and *The City in the Sea;* they are of a quality that one discovers in an imagination that glances the roots of human evil and superhuman joy and reveals their existence among the fears and desires of childhood origin. The "truth" of which Poe spoke so often in his critical asides

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was a truth that illuminated the hidden chambers of the human psyche, and among his fellows whom he saw on the streets of Philadelphia and New York, his discovery, as he looked inward to the sources of his own spirit, was of the darkened, private aspect of the multitudinous cheerful face that met its clients and its creditors, its friends at a card table or at a game of draughts. Within the multitude of faces, hardened by what he called the "Grin," his personal appearance was obviously singular, and for a brief time he exerted the full dexterity of his intelligence to take advantage of what seemed to be a singular position in the world about him. It is, I believe, useless to speculate upon what he might have done—or whether or not he would have reached in poetry at least the greater heights of Nathaniel Hawthorne's prose —if the circumstances of his being had been ever so slightly moderated in his favor. The wonder is not that his personal limitations so nearly destroyed the effectiveness of his literary career, and undoubtedly clouded his reputation in American criticism, but that within them he exerted a remarkable energy and a memorable insight.

Perhaps Edgar Poe will always remain an embarrassment in critical discussions of American literature; and of course a final word that reilluminates completely the world of his imagination cannot and will never be written by a hand other than his own. For my part I would repeat his warning which should be remembered as his epitaph: "The terror of which I write is not of Germany but of the soul."

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Film Chronicle:

"Mission to Moscow"

THE FILM version of *Mission to Moscow* has little artistic value, and the crudity and falseness of its content will hardly escape the eyes of informed people. Not only are the Moscow Trials re-staged as genuine, but new falsifications are added to the originals. Marshal Tukhachevsky, who was never publicly tried and was shot without benefit of confession, appears in open court with the other alleged conspirators. All those passages in Mr. Davies' book, in which he reveals how doubtful he was during the trials, are brazenly covered in the film by an enactment of his complete certitude in the court-room; in his own text he admits that only later events had led him to "see" the justice and significance of the trials. The history of Soviet and American foreign policy is retold with a similar disregard for fact, for reasons which must be clear to anyone who has followed closely the actual shifts during the last ten years.

These falsifications and their political meaning will no doubt be exposed in fuller detail in the labor press. But the historical and political content of the film should also be considered from another angle, as a type of propaganda film new to this country. The events leading up to the war are presented at the same time as the headlined history familiar to newspaper readers and also as the personal experience of an official eye-witness and participant. Through the combination of newsreels of Hitler Germany and Stalin Russia with the reenacted story of Mr. Davies, the latter takes on the qualities of an authentic historical reality. As he passes from shots of Nazi demonstrations, in which the whole German people seem to be massed before Hitler, to a scene of Davies-Huston making a futile proposal of disarmament to Schacht-Basch, the spectator feels himself transported behind the scenes to enjoy the same direct contact with the secret historical process as in his contemplation of the public review of the Nazi army. He knows that these are only two Hollywood actors, but he is led to believe by the surrounding context of news reels and by the official character of the film, based on the confidential reports of an American Ambassador and approved by the Soviet government, that the actors are reproducing the original events rather than Mr. Davies' version.

At the same time the sentiment of the little man of the democracies that world politics are a mysterious game in which figures beyond his own plane of vision manipulate the fate of the world for motives which are never quite clear is dissolved by the omnipresence of a plain-spoken American, who moves about everywhere armed with the wonderful

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authority of a mission from the President, and sees the inaccessible heroic or demonic creatures face to face, pleading with them, denouncing their evil intentions, applauding the good, and offering to the latter his sincere promise of cooperation. This messenger appears in his own guise in a prologue to the film to assure the audience, with priestly gesticulations of the eyes, mouth and hands, that he is a plain Christian American who has made good. Unlike the great heads of state who are shown only in their offices and at military reviews, Mr. Davies is often with his wife and pretty daughter, so that his political role strikes one not simply as a professional assignment or a fulfillment of private ambitions, but as a function of the whole human being, with his family attachment and the inherent decency of the man who cares for others. And by this humanization of the envoy, who is called away from a fishing trip, American diplomacy is transfigured as a moral, humane effort, an extension of the naive goodness and intimacy of ordinary people to the conduct of world affairs. Of this domestication of high politics there are other examples in the film. Litvinov also travels with his wife and daughter, and the twin families of the Russian and American diplomats are joined by ties of the strongest mutual affection. Mrs. Molotov appears as the manager of the cosmetic trust of the Soviet Union and we learn that in Russia as in the United States women wish to be beautiful and that in both countries the wives of diplomats are business women. When Davies calls upon Churchill in 1939, the English politician, not yet in the government, is laying a brick wall in his garden, like any English or American or Soviet workman, while the two wives exchange amenities.

Nevertheless, the politics of democracy cannot do without the divinely inaccessible leader. President Roosevelt is shown vaguely as a voice; sometimes we are permitted to see the back of his head and shoulder, like the Lord on Mount Sinai; sometimes only a hand is visible, as in old Christian images of Moses receiving the Law. The audience is left in doubt for a moment whether an actor or the President himself is on the screen. Davies tries in vain to reach Hitler; the devil cannot confront this simple, good-hearted American; but he shows himself at a safe distance to the millions of the Nazi armies and party and appears in newsreel shots of triumphal entries into Prague, Vienna and Paris. For a long time, Stalin is equally remote. But at the very end, as Davies is about to leave the Soviet Union and is saying good-bye to the dear little father, Kalinin, Stalin comes in unexpectedly,—a veritable theophany, which is prolonged by the dictator with an affectionate bonhomie that convinces us of the double nature, divine and human, of this prime mover of the Russian sixth of the globe.

Outside these two poles of the human and the superhuman in the United Nations lie all those treacherous, mediocre, ignorant and foolish elements who dare to question the wisdom of the great leaders: in Russia, the traitors who wreck factories and conspire with Hitler and the Mikado; in America, a swiftly filmed amalgam of pacifists, Bundists, isolationists and hysterical liberals, who are obstructing the efforts of the President on the eve of Pearl Harbor. The symmetry of Russian and American affairs is established with the same combination of newsreels and fabricated reality.

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The producers of the film have no doubt been troubled by the suspicions and criticisms voiced before its release. Their publicity betrays the motivations behind the picture and the uneasy consciousness of falsehood. The first still published in advance of the film was of Trotsky negotiating with Ribbentrop, an incident that is not even mentioned in the testimony of the Moscow trials (although history provides us with unquestionable documents of Ribbentrop's meetings with Stalin and Molotov). In selecting this shot, the producers gave away a central aim of the film, to fix in this country the belief that opponents of the government are a fifth column of the enemy, and that the strength of Russia comes precisely from the extermination of plotters against the state. But this phony incident was deleted from the film, with all other shots of Trotsky, presumably because of protests from Jewish groups which were disturbed by the anti-Semitic conclusions that might be drawn from such a scene. Afterwards, the advertising avoided all mention of the purges and the fifth column, and tried instead to establish the exactness of another order of correspondences. Day after day, there appeared in the press paired photographs of the actors and the people they impersonated, Huston and Davies, Whipper and Haile Selassie, Malone and Churchill, as if to convince us that the film was true because of the resemblance of the faces of the actors to the historic personalities portrayed. And as the climax of this displacement of the test of truth from the actions to the physical appearance of individuals, the publicity on the day before the opening of the film centered on the most marvellous and suggestive correspondence of all: Joe S. and Joe D. The two Joes came up from the ranks the hard way; the mother of the American Joe was an ordained minister of the gospel, and the Russian Joe studied in a theological seminary. The meeting of the two Joes in Moscow brought about the unity of their two nations in the sruggle against fascism. Just as those who wish to establish the truth of a reported miracle point to the correctness of the account of the setting and verify all the statements about the people, the buildings, the roads and the instruments involved in the miracle, so the directors of the film who wish to establish a correspondence with reality, where none exists, are forced to multiply examples of correspondences irrelevant to the main question.

In a recent book *Propaganda and the Nazi Film*, Siegfried Kracauer, who is certainly the best connoisseur of the German film, has observed as the main characteristic of the Nazi pictures their use of elements of unquestionable veracity, newsreels and maps and statistics, to create a deceitful pseudo-reality which impresses the audience as a directly experienced fact. No doubt he was mistaken in assuming that this method is peculiar to fascism. In *Mission to Moscow* the same devices have been imported to this country. This technique of falsification seems to arise naturally from the needs of the modern state, which operates on two planes and possesses a double set of truths, one the practical knowledge which governs the action in the interest of the ruling groups, the other the official doctrines and justifications addressed to the mass of the people who have little voice in the state and are the victims of the crises and wars that follow. As the gap between the real motives and the public explanations becomes wider and more apparent, the most

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powerful means are necessary to close this gap. The double nature of the film as photography and arranged spectacle makes it the perfect instrument for this end. The gap is filled with documents of indisputable correctness, films of actual events and of frequent personal manifestations of the leaders. But the astutely selected events, sometimes even prearranged for reproduction in the newsreels, teach us little about the hidden reality, and the direct confrontation of the public by the leader reveals nothing of his motives.

Yet in concealing political facts, the film betrays to some extent the real situation. In *Mission to Moscow* the antagonism of capitalist society and of Russia as a workers state, however corrupted and undemocratic, is completely veiled. The two systems are finally identified as one through the common moral sincerity and democratic spirit of their leaders and envoys. In Russia one is offered caviar and the genuine Ballet Russe, but nothing of the Bolshevik revolution. The Russian workers are no different from the American, and some of them may rise like our own to become factory managers. But the people themselves are never politically active, as they were in the twenties in the great films of the Revolution; the democratic process is nowhere to be seen in the picture. Everything follows from the action of an invisible power in the Kremlin.

In an English propaganda picture made before the war, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, the hero, fleeing a gang of foreign agents, finds himself on the platform at a political election meeting. He is altogether ignorant of the issues, yet he is able to improvise a speech which wins the applause of the crowd. By this cynical detail the makers of the film indicate their belief about the emptiness of democratic forms; the real fate of the country is decided by the struggles between secret agents. *In Mission to Moscow* these forms have disappeared from both Germany and Russia; in the United States they still survive in the short scornful sequences on Congress, the Senate Committee before Hull, and a public meeting addressed by Mr. Davies; but they add nothing to the nation's wisdom and are even obstacles to the truth. The destiny of the nation is in the hands of the President who knows and plans all in advance. Those who challenge him are discredited from the start.

MEYER SCHAPIRO

April 30, 1943

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Theatre Chronicle

Broadway's Spring Offensive

OF TWO spring plays on war themes, it is oddly enough, the more conventional one, the stodgy little play with a single, inexpensive set and a small, inexpensive cast, that makes the more effective claims on its audience's attention. Irwin Shaw's *Sons and Soldiers*, at the Morosco Theatre, has Max Reinhardt, Norman Bel Geddes, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Stella Adler, and a revolving stage, it has the tradition of Chekhov via Clifford Odets, it has the modern urban sentimentality of the *New Yorker* magazine, it has a number of "terrific" scenes (a mother nursing a prop baby onstage, chanting, "Drink, drink, when you grow up, you will go to the best restaurants and make your own French dressing," a middle-aged husband, drunk, laying bare his heart to his wife's young lover, and the wife, under a symbolic street lamp turning off the young idealist with a streetwalker's sneers), it has passages of the most strenuous rhetoric ("I have swum in the Atlantic Ocean, I have read the poetry of John Keats, and loved a woman to the point of madness"), it has all this, and it is both too much and not enough—the audience sits squirming in its seats, bored and embarrassed and uneasy, as though it had been impressed by some unhappy chance into the role of eavesdropper on a highly painful and intimate spectacle. That is the trouble with the new sensationalist school of writers, which is headed at the moment by Mr. Shaw: the impulse that produces the work appears to be purely exhibitionistic, the subject of the play or the short story is not a character or a situation or an idea but the author's own cleverness, his modernism, his culture, his irony, his political humanity, and the audience is obliged to complement his performance by itself assuming the part of the *voyeur*. Thus the spectator is condemned to remain the spectator, he is turned into a pair of large round eyes; participation is forbidden him, the feeling and the will are paralyzed, and it is all like a bad dream or like the stories of atrocities in the Gestapo prisons where the victims are compelled to witness the tortures of their comrades and can neither act nor betray human sympathy. But of course this is a democracy, and the playgoer, if he is not a dramatic critic, is at liberty to go home.

Naturally, to a playwright with Mr. Shaw's objectives, all the old considerations, the principles of dramatic construction, of character drawing, are irrelevant. *Sons and Soldiers* has not a single character who is plausible even as a stage figure; as for plot, the element of conflict is present, theoretically, in the mind of the heroine, but it never reaches the level of action. The point at issue on the stage is whether a young woman in the year 1913 should go on and have a baby, at some risk to her life, if she can look ahead and see what the world has in store for him in 1943. The answer, of course, is Yes, and the audience is aware of this from the beginning since it sees the young man's life unrolling and knows, therefore, that the choice has been made. The only possible interest, then, lies in the Why of the decision. Earlier in the season, Thornton Wilder tried to give a philosophical answer to the Why of the human race's decision and found it in the male principle of intellection.

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where Joyce had found it in the feminine creative principle. Mr. Shaw's affirmation, however, is not philosophical but Hollywood-practical. The child must be born because, in 1943, he will become engaged to the girl next door and wear the uniform of the United Nations. At an earlier point in the play, when the boy has been carrying on with a married woman, the answer has been decidedly No. The tragic acceptance of life is not for Mr. Shaw; he is humanity's fair-weather friend.

Needless to say, the war is not taken seriously by this author. The uniform is the costume of virtue, and that is all. In *Tomorrow The World*, by James Gow and Arnauld d'Usseau, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, the problems of fascism and democracy are, at any rate, opened for discussion in an atmosphere reminiscent of the Chicago Round Table. This is the play about the Nazi child, a paratrooper of the spirit, who steps from a plane into the home of a middle-western American college professor, bringing terror and evil and darkness with him. Before he is cured by the straightforwardess of a child and the discreet sympathy of a progressive school teacher, a picture has been slashed to pieces, a child has been hit on the head with a bronze ornament, an engagement has been broken, a spy discovered, and the professor has nearly committed a murder. This play is so wholeheartedly within the conventions of the American theatre that it exudes a certain stuffy yet innocent charm. We know this professor so well, we have seen him on the stage so many times that he has become our legendary culture-hero, and his house, with its flowered chintzes, its wall of books, its comfortable sofa, its comical maid, has become our American Valhalla, whether we like it or not. And we feel it as a kind of national outrage that this sacred home, this shrine of the *Nation* and the *New Republic*, should be violated by a goosestepping child. The play, then, gives a limited satisfaction; its aim is to entertain and instruct, and it does so with moderate success. The symbolism is obvious but well maintained. The fifth column which throws off its disguises at the appearance of Emil exists in the heart of the professor and his old-maid sister as well as in the person of a Bundist janitor named Muller, who is trying to get the key to the professor's laboratory where experiments of military importance are being carried on. What the audience carries home is the conviction that fascism is a disease which can be cured by patience, tolerance, intelligence, and by casting out the mote in one's own eye. This view is at least humane, and the spectator, here fully participating, feels his own humanity swell with a kind of pleasant ache in his bosom. Unfortunately, the catharsis, though real enough, is incomplete. The problem has been solved in a vacuum, in the pure ether of melodrama and progressive education, or, rather, *a* problem has been solved, but it is not precisely the problem we thought we were wrestling with. The child is not normal; he has had a traumatic experience, and his case is therefore not typical. In the same way, the question of anti-Semitism, which appears to have been mastered by the characters, turns out upon examination never to have been properly raised. The professor's Jewish fiancée, who is accepted by everyone on the stage, including, in the end, the Nazi child, is a young lady named Miss Richards; she is played by Shirley Booth, a blond actress whose last role was My Sister Eileen.

MARY MCCARTHY

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THE MOHAMMEDANS

(*Continued from page* 219)

the money, the quiet satisfaction at a difficulty conquered, and above all the ease and naturalness with which he, Simon, was counted upon. He stood up briskly, frowning to hide his pleasure:

"But this is no time for me to be babbling about my little problems! My advice to you is to go to the board meeting and straighten the matter out. You were, I take it, born in the Near East?"

"It doesn't matter where I was born," said Wiley Bey. "I was reborn in Islam."

"O, I see," said Simon, pulling his lip. "Well, there's nothing to do but go and explain the matter. I'm sure they'll understand, especially since you're not fit for military service in any case. On the other hand, if you don't go, they can be quite nasty, as you've no doubt heard."

"You seem to have a very poor grasp of principle," replied Wiley Bey, and even as he creased his face in a curious, almost roguish smile, he kept his eyes on Simon's. "One of our basic doctrines is that we live in this country only in the flesh. Spiritually, we live in Islam. How could I abandon my people for a meeting of the draft board?"

"Yes, of course," said Simon, worriedly. "I see your point. Still—."

The Negro got up impatiently, grimacing as he adjusted his leg. In the spacious apartment, the light was failing, shadows creeping out of corners, over the ceiling. From the kitchen came a strong odor of barley soup, and of an unidentifiable meat. For a desperate moment, Simon felt that despite all his efforts, the feeling of communion, born in the transfer of a rumpled dollar bill, was fading away forever. Then he clapped his hand to his head and cried:

"I've got it! I'll go myself!"

"You'll go yourself?"

"Why of course! I've nothing to do tonight, and come to think of it, I may very well have a friend on your draft board. In fact I expect to be called up sooner or later myself. I'm a man for whom the material world exists, as Gautier said. I'll explain the whole thing. I'm sure it will come out all right."

Wiley Bey rubbed his hand over his face: it left the curious grimace of craftiness and purity, a smile. At the same time, he was hungry, so that half-consciously he moved toward the kitchen door as he said:

"As a matter of fact, I think you're right!"

And, in a tone of amused and paternal scorn:

"You will remind them of my leg, of course. . . ." Then he pushed out his right jowl with his tongue and, fantastically, winked. "There's no doubt about it. Between white men, the thing could be arranged!"

Simon, slightly shocked, tilted his head to one side and pursed his lips ironically. Whereupon the Negro burst into an enormous peal of laughter and slapped his back with an extraordinary air of roguishness, unregenerate vitality, an attitude of fearlessness before his own sins. For a moment, Simon expected that he would be invited to dinner. The prospect intrigued and repelled him: *he would never be able to eat that Negro food!* But Wiley Bey was actually showing him out. At the door,

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they shook hands, rather ceremoniously, as though Simon were going forth to preach to the gentiles; and it was not until he was half-way down the stairs that it occurred to him that this, his rash and doubtful mission, was what Wiley Bey had wanted all along.

In the end the idea pleased him, bearing as it did the promise of some indefinable intimacy with this strange man. Simon paced his floor and imagined grave and electric conversations, in which problems would rise up and dissolve like paper in flame. . . . Yet the ticking of the clock and the onset of evening recalled him to the seriousness of the Negro's situation; and when the time came to leave he was overcome with terror.

He sat on his bed and thought, But this is absurd, what in the world shall I tell them? And what the devil have I to do with the whole business anyway?

Nevertheless, he arose, donned his black cloak and walked across the park. These shaded lawns and bushes were notorious trysting-places, already alive in the twilight. There were couples on the benches, whispering, stifled cries. Simon, his head cast down, his cloak almost dragging the ground behind him, passed through quickly, like a shadow, and noticed nothing. And so he walked the crowded streets, where kids ran screaming and cheap radios blared from furniture stores and groups of men and women broke to let him pass. He was so absorbed that he missed the sign on the store-window and had to turn back.

Two steps down, the interior of the store was divided by a low barrier, on the far side of which, around a conference table, sat the members of the board. They were absorbed in papers, spoke to each other in whispers. To the right, a few steps from the door, was a desk, behind which sat a young lady.

"Your name?"

"Charles R. Simon."

A banging of file cabinets.

"Are you sure this is your board? We have no record of you."

"O no, I've been dreaming, I beg your pardon! I've come on behalf of my—ah, client."

"I'm sorry," she said crisply. "It's against the law for selectees to be represented by counsel. If he wants to appeal, he'll have to come himself."

A Negro came in and respectfully removed his hat. The young lady made signs of addressing herself to the newcomer.

"Look," said Simon quickly. "To begin with, it's not a question of appealing but of—how shall I say?—explicating. Secondly, Mr. Wiley Bey is not my client in a legal sense, that was only a manner of speaking. I am his advocate but not his lawyer. In fact, I am not a lawyer at all." In the face of her astonishment, Simon was beginning to find a rare self-possession. "Suppose Mr. Wiley Bey were struck by an automobile and were physically incapable of appearing before the board?"

"Just a moment," she said, and walked back to the long table, letting the little door swing smartly behind her. The board-members looked up as she began to whisper furiously and quite audibly her account of what Simon had said. An efficient female, thought Simon, and the idea was large and slow like all his ideas at the moment, amused him disproportionately; buckteeth and sallow skin!

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"Understand," he interposed, "I did not state that Mr. Wiley Bey was struck by an automobile. I merely said that he was as effectively prevented from appearing here tonight *as if* he were so struck." He smiled benignly at the bucktoothed girl. "The difference, you will surely grant, is by no means negligible. To begin with, Mr. Wiley Bey did not receive notice of this meeting until today, a procedure which I regard as highly unfair. Further—"

"Hold on," said the white-haired man at the head of the table. The five men put their heads together for a moment:

"Do you mind stepping in here?"

Simon walked through the barrier that blocked off the interior of the store into two parts. He threw off his cloak with a superb and slightly ridiculous gesture, like an undersized comedian playing bullfighter.

"Let's get this straight," said one of the board members. (A heavy man, with blackrimmed glasses and kinky hair, he spoke with a slightly Jewish intonation.) "As far as the board is concerned, this man's name is Wiley, Hadde Wiley. He's a neighborhood character. I remember when he was leader of some fishy pan-asia cult, in the old days, before he became a Turk. Out to save the colored people through Japan and physical culture."

"Mr. Wiley's past associations," said Simon, "do not in the least affect the present circumstances."

"Okay. Have it your way. Officially we're through with him anyway. We told him half a dozen times he's got to comply with the law or take the consequences. The fact of the matter is that I wrote to him myself, the board had nothing to do with it. I figured we could afford to give him a last chance to straighten himself out."

By now, Simon was in an extraordinary state of controlled excitement. With one eye he watched the door as men came in—there were four of them now, sitting on the bench—and with the other he observed the faces of the members of the board. His mind had a curious clear emptiness; above all, he was filled with the sense of his own *eloquence,* and hadn't the slightest notion of what to say!

"Are you finished?" he asked.

"Not yet. You can do us a favor by telling Wiley he's in a bad way. That's no joke. He's been talking his followers into registering like he did. According to the F.B.I., that's *conspiracy.* Do you know what that means?"

Simon waved his hand deprecatingly: the point (with a little smile) was conceded. There was a moment of silence. Then he put his finger tips together and frowned portentously:

"I want it understood," he began, "that I come in no spirit of disruption or chicanery, but simply as an American citizen. Impelled by my desire for fairness and justice. What other connection could there be between this man and me? I am myself a Presbyterian, as was my grandfather, the first mayor of this town. As for the army, I expect to be called at any minute, and when I am, I shall go gladly, you may take my word for it. But what is the issue involved in this case? Surely you do not *want* to see this man arrested? That would only reflect on the patriotism of this neighborhood."

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Of the two Negro board-members, one was beginning to doze. The other murmured:

"Exactly!"

"Please come to the point," said the chairman.

"Aha!" replied Simon, with a subtle smile. "But what, precisely, is the point? If Mr. Wiley Bey were merely concerned with evading the draft, he'd need only point to his leg, which is lame and makes him unfit for service. As for his followers, the fact that they register as aliens does not absolve them from military service—"

"Aliens have the right to refuse induction," said the chairman.

"May I ask if any of them have?"

"I don't know. . . . Of course not! We didn't accept their registration in the first place. They were all born in this country. They've got to register as American citizens, which they are."

"Now," said Simon, leaning forward with a great sense of insidious mastery. "Now we come to the point! Are they American citizens? Legally, they are. But as Montesquieu so brilliantly showed, and it is from that great thinker that our very legal structure derives, we must concern ourselves with the *spirit* and not simply with the letter of the law. Wiley Bey finds it impossible to be a Moslem and an American at the same time. He chooses to be a Moslem, i.e. an ally rather than a citizen of our country!"

"There are five appeals waiting," said the young lady.

"One moment," put in the blackrimmed glasses. "Even if what you say is true—and I doubt it: Wiley Bey, I mean Wiley himself stood right here in front of this board and told us that this was a white man's war. That's just what he said: a white man's war—but be that as it may, and all the religious stuff aside, he still has to register properly. Agreed?"

"Agreed. And according to his conscience, to register properly is to register as a Mohammedan."

"But," cried the man in exasperation, "he still remains an American citizen! Anyone born in this country is an American citizen. That's the law! If he wants to be a Mohammedan let him go to China and take out his papers. Here he's an American and that's the end of it. A man can't walk out of his obligations by calling himself a Mohammedan!"

"Excuse me," said Simon imperturbably. "It has not yet been proved that Wiley Bey is trying to avoid any obligations. He called this a white man's war. So it is! It is also a war of the dynasts. Fortunately, our dynasts are interested in fighting it, else we should have been defeated long ago. . . . But granting the modern principle of sovereignty, you are no doubt obliged to take a rather legalistic view of the matter. I see your point perfectly."

"In short," said the chairman, "you consider him guilty yourself and have been wasting our time for nothing. Next case."

Simon was suddenly very tired. He stood there, dreamily, as the "next case" shuffled through the swinging door and came to stand beside him. What was all this nonsense about registrations and sovereignty, wars and citizens? He had been *performing* again, like a lawyer!

"One moment," he suddenly cried, his face working strangely. "I

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beg of you, one moment more! I came to this meeting with no idea of what I was going to say to you—and now I know! Yes, Simon is guilty, I mean Wiley Bey is guilty. We are all guilty!"

He paused, carried away, and pointed his finger at the ceiling.

"Consider for a moment what a chain of guilt must have produced a situation like this! The infinite multitude of mean and grandiose actions without which—without *all* of which—this world we cling to in desperation would not be ours. What Wiley Bey does not sufficiently realize and who can blame him?—is that the Negroes in this country are only one link in the chain. They were dragged here by men who had sold their souls to the devil. They were set free as a matter of expediency, *and that was the only possible way!* Wiley Bey is a powerful man, above all a man of moral earnestness. He is aware of the guilt of a country which gives birth to the slogans we hear and read every day. Buy Blabber's Beer and remember Pearl Harbor! No Negroes need apply! And so he in turn—I tell you, there's no end to it!—commits the sins of despair and pride, chooses to withdraw from a society which is still capable of absorbing his values. To dissolve the City which grew painfully, crookedly, corruptly, and which alone stands between us and the unending jungle!"

Simon paused again. He would have liked a great roll of drums, not for *effect*, but to make them listen. And, alas, he would have liked the words to come less easily, with no oratorical roundness or niceties of style. For Simon was so made that even now he feared that he might be *performing*, once more: his emotion part of the play.

"Surely, I am not myself a man of moral earnestness. Perhaps you are thinking that I am only a foolish buffoon. But I am capable of seeing how we are all responsible for the wrong we inherit and live with, day by day. It is a small vision, and often worse than useless. But believe me, nothing less than this vision can make sense of such a case as Wiley Bey's."

He stopped, and squinted myopically at the faces of the board members. With the exception of a Negro minister, who was dozing, they all looked rather embarrassed.

"Are you finished?" said the chairman, heavily.

Simon, quite suddenly, was embarrassed himself. He smiled awkwardly and made a deep bow:

"*Opus superabat materiam.* Nevertheless, I have spoken."

"Thank you for your inspiring message. Officer, will you please show this man to the door?"

And so he swirled his cloak around his shoulders and walked out, followed by the policeman who had appeared from nowhere to fill his heart with the familiar unreasoning terror. Sweating, he mounted the two steps. O blueclad terror of marginal men! Had he broken a law? Was the hand coming down on his shoulder? . . . The Negroes, who had been sitting open-mouthed on the bench, turned as he passed, and stared. Then they looked back to the members of the board.

Outside, his sudden fright gave way to confusion. His mind instantly filled with what he had meant, the qualifications and nuances,

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what was implied or should have been, or what he had simply forgotten —all that a shifting jumble soon impossible to distinguish from what he had actually said. Moreover, it occurred to him that the board had neglected to reply, i.e., to pass formally on the fate of Wiley Bey. In fact, since Simon was not repelled but rather tempted by the absurd, he might have popped his head through the door and demanded his word of decision, were it not that the policeman's broad back so thoroughly blocked the doorway. . . . He hovered there for a moment, and at last decided to go home.

But he could not go home. He carried with him through the crowded streets an obscure feeling that this evening was not done. At the corner of State Street he stood looking across at the dark and uninviting park, until a little black boy, hurtling in pursuit of another, almost knocked him over. Gasping for breath, he smiled feebly, patted the boy's head and drew his hand back as though it had been bitten by the strange and kinky hair. Passers-by turned to stare at this odd little figure in a black cloak. Idlers on the corner moved closer. Simon, his eyes wary and apprehensive, turned quickly and walked down State Street, moving— with the bright lights and crowds and blare of sound receding, and the park lying black and brooding across the street—into a different world. As from the brightness and febrile joy of earthly perdition to the swirling darkness of hell. He walked along a number of warehouses, then past a squat, redbrick building—an undertaking establishment—and an alley which was half-blocked by an old dilapidated hearse. He moved out into the street, skirted the car and found himself staring at Wiley Bey's church.

It was a large store, with two show-windows, one of which bore the multicolored legend: FIRST TEMPLE OF MOHAMMED COME TO ISLAM. On the other window there was a cheap, hand-painted sign in black and white: HEAR WILEY BEY!!! I WENT TO WASHINGTON AND WHAT DID I SEE????

Simon went hesitantly to the door, which was open, and looked in. Wiley Bey, his long arm thrashing the air above his turban, was describing the iniquities he had seen in Washington. For a moment, Simon watched him, curiously and distantly, almost without a sense of recognition. Wiley Bey's face was distorted. His speech, which had been simple and even in tone, with at times a touch of pedantry, was now wilfully and exaggeratedly *Negro*, high-pitched, full of special intention. The audience, crowded on all the benches, standing two-deep along the walls, participated in every phrase and intonation.

"N so I done tole dat ole govment clerk, now look heah man . . ."

"Aymen," cried a shrill voice; and another rhythmically, the voice of an ancient hag who squatted in the rear: "Whad you all done tole dat man, son?"

"Why ah done tole the exac same thing ah done tole you!"

"Tell it, son!"

"Aymen, father!"

"*Do*, Pasha Bey!"

"Ah tole um, you kin beat a colud folks down! You kin take his

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money n take his skin! You kin lynch him n burn him, BUT YOU AINT GONNA GIT HIS SOUL!"

The enthusiasm leaped up to meet him, almost drowning out his final words. *No, they shouted, never; you tell it, father, no, no, no!* Simon, frowning, looked about the hall with a curious nervousness, less defined but akin to his mad fear of the blue-coat; he looked about the hall, heard the stamping and groaning and chortling, saw the arms fly up and the moist and shining eyes. In some extraordinarily physical way, he was assailed by all this. He blinked and backed out of the doorway, thinking: he's a charlatan, a rapist, no doubt a very great man! Wiley Bey imperiously calmed the crowd and changed his tone, speaking quietly, persuasively. Now he's telling him he's stronger than they, thought Simon, and that it's useless to resist. At that moment, a white man detached himself from the crowd which lined the wall on the right, and walked back toward the door. He was a well-dressed young man, with a knowing tilt to his new grey hat; very tall and—in that mass of rags, bent backs and ravaged faces—almost offensively handsome, strong, self-possessed. He walked through the doorway, unceremoniously hustling Simon as he passed; then he wheeled about, smiling ironically, and expertly hung a cigarette on his lip.

"You've got to hand it to these niggers," he said. "They sure know how to put on a show!"

Simon did not reply. Usually of an almost neurotic politeness, he was annoyed now, by all this supercilious youthfulness and detachment. The young man broadened his smile.

"I suppose you're a Mohammedan too!"

Simon drew himself up haughtily. "In this country," he said, "we're all Mohammedans. When you've lived a little longer and seen something of the world, you'll understand that."

"Well what do you know!"

"These people, to be sure, are a slightly heretical sect."

O this was his evening of eloquence and public action! Smiling slyly, yet with a face ingenuous and persuasive, his two hands palms outward in a gesture of evidence, clarity, simple faith, Simon turned—to find that the young man had disappeared. Astonished, he moved out to the curb and saw him striding swiftly away, in the direction of the bright lights.

Inside the store, there was a great murmur and chatter, a pushing back of benches. The meeting was over, people were crowding around the platform; Wiley Bey was nodding gravely, shaking hands. This was the moment that Simon, all unconsciously, had come for: he would go in, report on his visit to the draft-board, clear the matter up. . . . Negroes were beginning to drift out of the store, eyeing him curiously. A fat old lady, very black, planted herself in front of him and, with the most extraordinary insolence, stared him up and down. Simon backed away. Yes, now that he was here, he was anxious to talk to Wiley Bey. They would have a long conversation, *their first*, full of warmth and understanding. He would tell the Negro where he was wrong and where he was right. He would confess his own intimate sins.

Alas! Now the crowd, moving boisterously out of the hall, threat-

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ened to engulf him, pushed him back to the street. All at once, the prospect of making his way through that dense Negro mass was too much for him. There would be time enough, he told himself, tomorrow. He hesitated yet a moment, then turned and walked off, past the hearse in the alleyway and the funeral hall; in the direction of the bright lights.

III

Simon's Journal . . .

Tuesday: Saw Wiley Bey in the morning. He was in a hurried and rather grumpy mood. Noticed for the first time that he has a wart on his neck, just below the turban.

I fear I was rather overwhelmed by the humorous possibilities of the draft board affair. (My old way of escaping the absurd: by being sure to see it first.) I remembered all sorts of details—the voice of the secretary, the cat in the corner, the sleepy minister; and *I saw myself,* dancing before those good citizens like a caricature of a lawyer, another good citizen,—so that all in all the story took too long, which irritated Wiley Bey, and I failed to impress him with the seriousness of the situation. When finally I began, in a considered and dignified way, to urge my point of view, W. B. had to go off somewhere.

He's recovered his pristine distance.

In the afternoon, sat down to my desk. But I was rather tired and above all preoccupied with the *whole question* of W. B. Aside from all he means to this time and place (how he barged in and destroyed the very sense of my house!) I kept thinking of his strangeness, the pronounced Negro odor that already possesses his apartment, the three women who continue to hover in the background like permeating incarnations of—what? Who had thought we were so superstitious? . . . In the end I gave up trying to work.

Tuesday: After last notation, rather depressed, gave myself up to the melancholy and damnable practice of drinking alone—and finished the bottle of wine. Slept late and was awakened by W. B. who stood about, jovial and unembarrassed, while I dressed. In the course of my ablutions he shouted through the bathroom door an Arab proverb to the effect that nothing is more pleasant than pissing after wine. Asked him to reconcile that with the Koran's well-known ban on alcohol. He insisted that Moslems consider not wine but drunkenness sinful, i.e. anything tending to surrender the individual's ascendency over his own spirit. Point can be checked. W. B. begged my pardon for his brusquerie of yesterday, alluding to difficulties within his movement (schism?!) which apparently were removed by prompt action. No describing him in a happy mood. While waiting, he strode about, ponderously, filling the air with his deep humming: themes from symphonies, especially Beethoven. Voice, chest, power, the shine of his skin—he positively swells the room.

The whole question of W. B. seemed less theoretical, more fraught with anguish, for I kept thinking: What if they should really pounce on a man like this? At the same time there was something provocative about all that force, and perhaps about the scorn with which he handled my books (like childish things he had long ago put away)—so that I found

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myself largely talking about myself. When he said something (in reply to my notion of religion) about the dishonesty of *inventing* a divine order, particularly if one knew what one was about, I tried to explain. That is, without stopping to adumbrate the extraordinary complexity of the process of believing, and the subtlety (in a business like this) of knowing 'what you were about', I told him frankly: "What matters to men like us, is not what we are—an endless question!—but what we manage to distil on the clean white paper."

"That is too bad," he answered (only a literary man could be expected to know what I meant). "For if you don't write what you are you write nothing but verses. There's no hope for you at all."

Just then—I was standing at the window—a police car slowed down at the curb, and an officer poked his head out of a window, scrutinizing the house. The automobile did not stop. It was gone in an instant. But its sudden appearance gave me such a shock that I lost all desire to make W. B. see what I meant. I simply said, in guise of transition to a more pressing problem:

"I suppose *you* think we ought to come to Islam?"

He hesitated, frowned and moved to the door, speaking coldly:

"Islam is for men with dark skins."

Something to be worked out: the question of roles. Rich man, poor man, beggerman thief—at bottom am I attached to nothing? Is one role as good as another, provided one finds the proper style? Worse: nothing is ever *resolved* in our country. The point is important. I sit here and lose the name of action, grumbling about the moral formlessness of it all: everything is slurred over, arranged, or forgotten. No heroism, no grandeur. Whenever a real question arises, it is destroyed precisely by its American particularity, which means that the principle involved is forever distorted by every kind of irrelevance.

Thursday: Sold shoes today, O *supplice!* Came home early (pleading headache) to see W. B., but no one home upstairs. Tried to do some work: too agitated, expecting W. B. at any moment. But I was already in bed when they finally came home and began singing their weird songs. I put on a robe, went upstairs and entered the room, saying: "Wiley Bey, you are guilty of Satanic pride!" This produced a considerable effect, everyone laughed. The women disappeared as usual, and I told W. B. that the great danger was *gleichschaltung*, the deadly unifying process, the elimination of conflict. The atomisation of groups into helpless individuals in face of the monster state. All this aided and abetted by his voluntary withdrawal. Etc. etc. He was affable, offered me wine (!) but obviously not in a mood to dispute or listen. And apparently my presence inexorably banished the women. Besides, I was chilly in my robe and felt a cold coming on. So I took a little wine and went downstairs. . . .

Friday morning, Simon woke up sneezing. He puttered about dismally, making coffee, washing dishes, trying to think what he had intended to do that day. But of course there was only one thing to do.

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He dressed and went upstairs. This time he stood shivering in the hall, without exaltation, and knocked. One of the women called softly:

"Who dere?"

"It's I. Simon."

The door opened. Wiley Bey was standing at the front window. He looked small, round, impenetrable, at the end of the long expanse of floor. He turned from the window and said:

"Well, here they are."

Simon walked across the floor. He was already frightened. In fact he had been frightened all along, from the very beginning. He wished Wiley Bey would stop grinning in that ghastly unrecognizable way, like some sinister African idol. Downstairs, the police were mounting to the front door. A dark green sedan had drawn up behind the squad car, and some men in plain-clothes were getting out. The bell rang. Simon was suddenly overwhelmed by the Negro odor of this place.

"Do you mind going down?" said Wiley Bey. "The buzzer doesn't work."

Simon went to the hall and descended the steps. Half-way down, he was stopped by the Negro's voice. "Ask them for a warrant," said Wiley Bey, who was standing at the door. "Tell them they can't come breaking into my house without a warrant." Simon was seized with a violent fit of shivering: it was as though he were *dreaming* of shivering. And oddly, he was struck by the illogic of the Negro's attitude. To begin with, it isn't your house, he thought. Moreover, you've repudiated the whole business, warrants and all. . . . His mind moved slowly, in wide irrelevent sweeps. In any case, it didn't matter: when he turned to speak, Wiley Bey had disappeared from the landing.

Simon first opened his own door, and left it ajar. Then he unlocked the front door, saying:

"Mr. Wiley ah, lives on the second floor . . ."

Of course he had no time to mention the warrant. Three policemen shouldered their way past him and mounted the stairs. Two others stood in the doorway and looked ironically at Simon, who retired to his threshold. One of them said:

"Where you going?"

"I live in here," said Simon. "On the first floor."

"Stay right where you are."

"Keep us company," added the other policeman, in a somewhat less threatening tone. But then he turned to the other and, with an air of quiet philosophical inquiry:

"You know, I never been able to figure it out. Where does a white guy come *off*, living in a house with niggers?"

"Hell, that's nothing," said the other. He looked at Simon and spat on the porch. "There's white girls in houses go down on niggers. . . . You know I think I seen this guy somewhere. What's your name?"

"Simon. Charles R. Simon."

"You a friend of this guy Wiley? How'd you know we was looking for *him?*"

"This house," began Simon, with a miserable awkward ingratiating smile, "has been in my family for many generations. I—"

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The stairway door opened and one of the policemen appeared. Simon suddenly flushed red, thinking of what he had been about to say. He felt that he had disgraced himself and would disgrace himself again. Before whom? What god or moral law? He knew only the desertion of his courage which left him no humanity, no hope; he had smiled and smiled and he was damned forever.

"That black bastard's a real lawyer," said the policeman at the stairway door. "He won't let us in without a warrant."

"Break in the door and give him the flub-a-dub."

"Well what do you know," said the other. "Wan-ton bru-tality!" He winked broadly at Simon and walked to the plainclothesmen who were standing by their sedan. Simon (alas!) made another, feebler effort to smile. The uniformed man came back and went up the steps again. He was followed by a plainclothesman.

"If you had any self-respect, you woulda got the hell out of here as soon as these boogies come in."

(Upstairs, the policemen blew the lock off the door and advanced on Wiley Bey who retreated slowly, saying: "Just show me that warrant, that's my right!" One of the men in uniform swung suddenly, knocking the Negro down. Wiley Bey arose, jerked his bad leg stiff and crashed his enormous fist into the blueclad chest. The policeman fainted. The other three began to use their clubs on Wiley Bey, keeping him off balance, battering him about the room.)

"That is what comes of not taking a white man's word."

"I suppose you're a Mohammedan too."

(Upstairs, the women began to scream.)

"Of course I'm not," said Simon, with a nervous laugh. "My family has been Presbyterian for six generations."

A second plainclothesman—Simon recognized with terror the young man he had spoken to in front of Wiley Bey's meeting—came to the hall door and shouted up for the men to hurry. (The women had stopped screaming. They were applying cold water to Wiley Bey's face.) One of the men at the door said:

"What do you say, we take this guy with us too, cap?"

"That's right," said the other. "You can see right off he's a dangerous guy."

The plainclothesman looked at Simon with professional boredom and said:

"Leave him alone. He's just a crackpot."

On the second floor, the policemen emerged from the apartment, half-carrying, half-dragging Wiley Bey. The Negro's turban hung down grotesquely over his bloody face. He was conscious; his eyes met Simon's as he passed; he even smiled, with his swollen lips, and said something indistinct. In general (it seemed to Simon) a quite repulsive air of triumph and self-satisfaction.

The policeman who had been knocked out came down last; very pale, he muttered: "That black bastard broke half my ribs." Simon closed his door, went to the front window, and stood watching them get into the cars and drive away. *The house was his again.* The idea kept getting in the way of what he was trying to think. . . . What was it?

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But there's nothing, he said to himself bitterly, nothing you can make of it. Wiley Bey, for example, imagines he's proved some point or other. And suddenly Simon (who couldn't bear pain of any kind) began to bang his forehead hard against the wooden panelling between the two windows, saying aloud each time:

"But he hasn't, he hasn't, he hasn't!"

Books

A NEW YORK CHILDHOOD

GENESIS: BOOK ONE. By Delmore Schwartz. New Directions. $3.00

Like Oedipus,
No one can go away from genesis,
From parents, early crime, and character,
Guilty or innocent!

Five years ago Delmore Schwartz's first book, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, was greeted with more critical acclaim than has come to any other American poet of his generation, the generation since Auden. As a result Schwartz was placed in the hardest position for a young writer to sustain in a spot-lighted age, a beginning poet with a reputation to live up to. When his short verse play, *Shenandoah*, seemed slight, it then became the fashion to declare that he had been overpraised and had not deserved his reputation in the first place. It is fortunate for both the poet and his readers that *Genesis* is a marked advance over all his previous work, and that it is impressive in a way that recent poetry has too seldom been—in the range of its subject-matter.

As he says in his preface, Schwartz aims to be "one more of the poets who seek to regain for Poetry the width of reference of prose without losing what the Symbolists discovered." He bears out this aim by presenting a whole phase of our cultural history, the image of American life that was formed for and by the immigrants of the end of the nineteenth century, who came from Central Europe to survive or endure in New York. Their intentions were not political; their American dream was that of greater wealth. The most strikingly drawn character in Schwartz's narrative, Hershey Green's father, becomes a terrifying embodiment of our naked lusts. Running away from Czarist Russia to join his older brother here, Jack Green soon gets his feet on the economic ladder. He climbs to being a successful dealer in real estate, and thus fulfills the intense feeling that he had brought with him from Europe, that "the ownership of land was the greatest material thing." His other passionate drive is for sensuality. His marriage with self-willed tactless Eva Newman is a succession of brutal scenes over his infidelities. ("Is not escape a major industry in North America?"). At the time of the outbreak of the first World War, she is trying desperately to hold him by bearing him a son, and Jack Green feels proud and secure. Although the other lights may be going out in Europe, for him in America the radiance of making money surpassed them all in brilliance.

The form that Schwartz has devised for presenting his material is

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an alternating sequence of prose narrative and choric comment. The narrative consists of the compulsive reflections of sixteen year-old Hershey Green as he lies sleepless one night and rages through all that he knows of his history, from his own memory and from family report. The chorus, a shadowy group of the dead, give their minds to discuss and explain, since, in the detachment of death, their sole desire is for clarification through full knowledge. The advantages for the author in such a chorus are obvious: he can gain thereby great density of reference. But the dangers are equally patent. Such commentators can overinterpret, and can then prove merely a distraction from the forward-moving story. And although the poet cites Hardy among the modern witnesses for a chorus, the example of *The Dynasts* is different in two crucial respects. For one thing, Hardy's various groups, such as the Spirits of the Pities and the Spirits Ironic, are characterized by a dramatic point of view, whereas Schwartz's succession of voices have no clear identity and often lose themselves in mere fluidity. What is even more important, the form of the choruses seems frequently too relaxed for full effectiveness. To be sure, Schwartz has stated that he has "no wish to emulate Swinburne," but that he seeks rather to approximate the flat accents of ordinary speech. But one of the most living delights of art is the surprise of contrast, and, as an offset to the prose narrative, the reader's ear often longs for more of the resources of verse than Schwartz avails himself of, for more formal stanzaic patterns, and for at least an occasional tightening up by rhyme.

As it is, we are faced with the anomaly that the most lyrical passages of the book are expressed in prose. An exquisite moment occurs when Hershey, coming downstairs for his sixth Christmas and finding the bicycle for which he had longed, wheels it over to the window and comes face to face with an even more overpowering joy, the new snow, the deepest symbol to him always of the mystery of release. Schwartz's writing is masterly at such a juncture, and the chief reason why he can convey the warmth of breathless emotion is that he has disciplined his narrative as he has not disciplined his choruses, by stylizing his prose up to a tense rhythmical pattern. We have travelled a curious distance from the lesson that Eliot and Pound learned from Henry James, that poetry ought to be as well written as prose.

I may exaggerate this point, but the success of *Genesis* assuredly lies primarily in the accumulating richness of consciousness on the part of the growing boy. The narrative is thus a type of *Bildungsroman*, and is a further addition to what seems to have become about our most frequent modern genre since *Buddenbrooks* and *Swann's Way* and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. But there is a peculiar freshness to Schwartz's contribution to the genre, a freshness that is owing to his most distinctive gift, irrespective of which medium he works in. He has a fine capacity for combining lyric immediacy with philosophical reflection, and can thus command both the particular and the general. His great flair for observing all the surfaces of Hershey's environment is not allowed to degenerate into the production of mere décor, for Schwartz holds tenaciously to the poet's high responsibility to intelligence. Thus the passage about the bicycle and the snow—and here the chorus serves

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Schwartz well—widens out into Aristotle's perception that motion "is being's deepest wish." It is the same case with Hershey's other discoveries. The street games of "Buttons" and "Picture Cards", in which he so delights, are seen as "drunk with contingency and private property, the deepest motives that surrounded the playing boys." The Katzenjammer Kids who bore and perplex Hershey "with their endless destruction" are discerned as "presenting the adult vision of childhood," the vision of the anarchy which adults "yearned for and could not have." The narrative sections on Hershey's first big league ball game and on his going to see Chaplin in *The Kid* become, through similar broad handling, memorable passages of moral history.

The first book of *Genesis* takes Hershey up through grade 4A in school, and thereby gives occasion for a passage on Lincoln, one of the most effectively unified of the choruses, which is underscored with the belief that

In fact, the North and South were losers both:
—Capitalismus won the Civil War.

The narrative comes to a violent climax when Eva Green and Hershey, out riding on a Sunday afternoon with friends, encounter Jack Green and his woman at a roadhouse:

Childhood was ended here! or innocence
—Henceforth suspicious of experience!

Hershey has already known for the first time what it is to be scorned as a Jew; and talking to a Catholic boy, he begins to have a sense of other mysteries. In continuing his story beyond this point, Schwartz will have to be on his guard to avoid becoming involved in Hershey's adolescent self-pity. A related problem for the form will be to devise some variation of the alternating narrative and chorus, which has already become monotonously expected by the end of this first book. But the deepening themes of Schwartz's thought give great promise for what lies ahead in Hershey Green's unfolding experience. For Schwartz's firm command of Marxist history has not prevented him from becoming aware of the renewed urgency of religious issues. And his profound belief that Europe is "the greatest thing in North America" should prove one of the important forces for the renewal of our culture in these days when we are continually threatened by a recrudescence of narrow nationalism.

F. O. MATTHIESSEN

THE HUMOR OF EXILE

THE WORLD OF SHOLOM ALEICHEM. By Maurice Samuel. Knopf. $3.

Throughout Mr. Samuel's book there is a tone of patient, literal, laborious and repetitive explication which, though certainly poorer than Sholom Aleichem deserves, is nevertheless justified. Mr. Samuel, true to the title of his work, is writing primarily about a world; and though "worlds" are large and public entities, universally knowable or known, here, however, is one which in the space of hardly fifty years has all but vanished. It is the world of *Golos* (Diaspora) further dispersed, existing at present only in reminiscence, and only in vestiges of religious or communal tradition. At one time it was the center of Jewish learning and

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culture. The east European settlements, in Poland and in the Pale surrounding Kiev, of which Sholom Aleichem wrote, were great communities, flourishing as well as misfortune, repressions and pogroms would allow. But it was in the nature of this world to die. Even without pogroms, without Chmelnitzky and Petlura, who failed, and Hitler who succeeded in destroying it, it would have died, a victim, even, of an innocent history in whose changes it neither had, nor wanted, a part. Mr. Samuel has, therefore, done well in making his exposition careful and clear and detailed. He should certainly have shown, as I imagine he possesses, a more philosophical understanding of his subject; and, since he was dealing with one of the greatest folk-artists, he might have devoted more attention to the individual stature of the man and the techniques of his craft. But by way of capturing and translating into the English language traits and qualities of a culture which was lost in social translation, Mr. Samuel has succeeded admirably.

There have been many Jewish worlds. The one known through the novels of Sholom Asch (*Three Cities*) or I. J. Singer (*The Brothers Ashkenazi*) represents the breakdown of traditional folkways under the influence of industrialism, and the emergence of a Jewish proletariat and a modern middle class. This aspect of history the Jews of Asch and Singer share with the rest of the world, and their story has successfully been translated because their life was itself in process of translation. But the life of Kasrielevky (Pauperville), Sholom Aleichem's archtypical village, was too far removed from the origins of social change, too limited in its access to history and too faithful to its own traditions to endure without breakdown the eventual adjustments that were forced upon it. Kasrielevky was guarded but exhausted by an old religion which had never learned to rationalize adaptation to the world.

In Kasrielevky, religion, like mud and chicken feathers, clung to one's very boots. Let alone the Sabbath, holidays, ceremonies and learning,—even haggling involved Scripture. Sholom Aleichem's Jews, it is correct to say, were a religious group. Of necessity their religion was more than a dogmatism, unrelated, or in winking contradiction to the life they led. Their religion affected their most familiar and intimate emotions, the perpetual insecurity, fear and nostalgia of the homeless, fortified them with parables, and provided a metaphysics of sentiment as well as an immediate guide to the conduct of life. Besides, it was fundamentally a secular religion, for it provided the only available basis for culture. But while this religion embraced the world, it was also profoundly alienated from it, and acknowledged Kasrielevky only as society, never as a homeland. All thought and expression, even the most trivial modes of intercourse among the Jews were permeated with yearning for Eretz Israel, for home. Even the Yiddish language, as Mr. Samuel shows in a brilliant chapter, was never allowed to develop affinity for the natural world; it was poor in object-names, recognizing only the few miserable species of flower and bird whose existence alone the exiled, for fear of forgetting Jerusalem, permitted themselves to acknowledge.

Sholom Aleichem's humor drew upon the phenomena of alienation. He himself was a man of "Western" culture, born of a landed middle class family (rare among Russian Jews), to whom the progressive and

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revolutionary traditions of the nineteenth century were perhaps even more available than the traditions of Kasrielevky. But though he belonged outside the world in the depiction of which his greatness lay, his own alienation fostered his sympathy for the less sophisticated exile in which his characters lived. (Here, his sympathy, one of recognition rather than of surrender, followed an instinct of wise artistry. He did not identify himself with the life of his people; rather, he recognized the identity in pattern between their lives and his own—a distinction which proletarian novelists have never understood). His humor was preoccupied with poverty—poverty, the visible symbol of man's alienation from the world. He constructed a comedy of endurance, balancing the fantastic excess of misfortune (always short of life's complete destruction, yet always threatening to attain its end) against the precious but useless resources of the human spirit which can make equally fantastic accommodations, can even overwhelm the world with its enthusiasm, and yet remains no less impotent than the despair it sedulously avoids. In this respect, Sholom Aleichem was in the great tradition of Chassidism, to which he provided the secular counterpart. Enthusiasm and ecstasy are the ideal limits of his humor, just as they were the final values of the Chassid's worship. His was the humor which loves the world from which it seeks to be delivered.

Deliverance is a familiar theme in Jewish thought, and remains, however disguised or modified, a basic concept in its social philosophy. We would naturally expect the social, as distinct from the religious meaning of the term, to imply a rather clear set of values, a sense of injustice and indignation, and a program of rectification. But the peasant tradition in literature, especially in Sholom Aleichem's time, reinforced as it was by the influence of Russian populism, introduced several complications, religious in origin, which had a natural result in offsetting social thought from the centrality of the thesis of class struggle. Sholom Aleichem, like Silone today who also celebrates poverty, would seem to suggest a fundamental ambiguity in man's desire for salvation. This ambiguity results from the double function of alienation, to both of whose meanings Sholom Aleichem subscribed. On the one hand, suffering and privation leave men alienated from the world, free to act, in default of possession, towards the reconstruction of the social order and the redistribution of worldly goods. On the other hand, their alienation from objects produces an alienation from values, deprives them of enthusiasm for action and leads them back to their poverty as the only trustworthy and familiar, if not the only possible, locus of values. Men's original indignation is sapped by a loss of faith, and leaves a residue of pity and self-love which no program of rectification can draw off. So Sholom Aleichem elaborates the symbol of poverty, which he identifies with the Jews' particular plight, their alienation even from the class struggle, the alienation, when all else is restored, of remaining homeless on the earth. While awaiting deliverance, he is sceptical of all other alternatives. He will not venture farther than the values immanent in his love for his people.

For Sholom Aleichem, I should judge, there was no valid distinction to be drawn between reformism and revolution in politics. Extremes

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could never catch the only important issue between them, nor gradations, subleties or concessions of thought. Only one doctrine could strike the point of possible cleavage between the world of Kasrielevky and the world at large, and that was the doctrine, Zionist in whatever form, that not until the Jews once again had a home could they hope to attain, without foregone futility, the values and responsibilities of modern life. Consequently he could find no standard for evaluating the variety of revolutionary theories which were beginning to appear even in Kasrielevky. He could extend his sympathy to all of them, but his hope to none. The breakdown of Jewish life could only be accelerated by participation in the class struggle (a participation which he nevertheless approved). But for the Jews even the most basic revolution in society could only be reformist in scope. Their revolution would first have to be historical: the history of Diaspora would first have to be brought to a close. Until then they had not even chains to lose, nor, since chains imply fixation, even the hope of acquiring a few.

Sholom Aleichem has often been compared with Dickens. The comparison is superficially plausible, as far as resemblances in verbal humor and characterization are concerned. But there is a fundamental divergence between the two, which typifies the Jewish author's removal from the entire tradition which, in greater or less degree, has united all social novelists. Society, for Sholom Aleichem, was less the object than the source of his sentiment, and thus love, more than indignation, gave motive to his art. What he felt toward his people, toward their poverty and hopelessness, was always directed outward, as if proceeding from their, rather than his own heart. He himself was perhaps capable of a greater individual expression that the one he achieved. But folk artists lose nothing by their sacrifices. He would not instruct, rouse, organize his people toward any perspective available only to himself; he would not go beyond the limitations they themselves could not transcend. But it was not so much selflessness as an extreme self-development through love which reinforced his original fidelity to the sources of his growth. He could see the hopelessness of his people's traditions from the liberation of his own knowledge; but he also knew, through the identity of personal experience, the hopelessness of their lives. And it was his love, not only his uncertainty, which made him cling with them to a faith he had abandoned, and to celebrate, with as great a joy and tenderness as possible, the impoverished world within which they built, and later lost their lives.

ISAAC ROSENFELD

AN ABSTRACTION BLOODED

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction. By Wallace Stevens. The Cummington Press. $3.00.
Parts of a World. By Wallace Stevens. Knopf. $2.00.

In one of Mr. Stevens' early poems he made the simple declaration that "Poetry is the supreme fiction," and in another there was a phrase about "the ultimate Plato, the tranquil jewel in this confusion." Now, in *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,* he shows us a combination of the two notions with a development into a third thing, which if it is not

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reached is approached from all round. The poem is like a pie marked for cutting in three pieces, with an imaginary centre which is somehow limited, if you look long enough, only by the whole circumference. A triad makes a trinity, and a trinity, to a certain kind of poetic imagination, is the only tolerable form of unity. I think the deep skills of imagination, by which insights, ideas, and acts get into poetry, thrive best when some single, pressing theme or notion is triplicated. It is not a matter of understanding, but of movement and of identification and of access of being. The doublet is never enough, unless it breeds. War and peace need a third phase, as liquid and ice need vapor to fill out and judge the concept of water, as God the Father and God the Son need the Holy Ghost, or hell and heaven need purgatory, or act and place need time. The doublet *needs* what it makes. This is a habit of creative mind.

Mr. Stevens has acquired that habit. Wanting, as we all do, a supreme fiction, wanting, that is, to conceive, to imagine, to make a supreme being, wanting, in short, to discover and objectify a sense of such a being, he sets up three phases through which it must pass. It must be abstract; it must change; it must give pleasure. Each phase is conceived as equal in dimension, each being given in ten sections of seven three-lined stanzas; and each phase is conceived as a version of the other two, that is, with a mutual and inextricable rather than with a successive relationship.

Let us see what the elements of the Fiction look like when taken separately. It must, the poet argues, be abstract, beyond, above, and at the beginning of our experience, and it must be an abstract idea of *being*, which when fleshed or blooded in nature or in thought, will absorb all the meanings we discover. That is to say, it must be arche-typical and a source, an initiator of myth and sense, and also a reference or judgment for myth and sense; it tends to resemble a Platonic idea in character and operation, and its natural prototype, its easiest obvious symbol, will be the sun. But it must change in its abstractness, depending on the experience of it, as a seraph turns stayr "according to his thoughts"; for if it did not change it would tend to disappear or at least to become vestigial. You take character from what is not yourself and participate in what changes you. The process of change is the life of being, like abstraction, requires constant iteration and constant experience. Most of all the Fiction must change because change is the condition of perception, vision, imagination. "A fictive covering/weaves always glistening from the heart and mind." What changes is the general, the instances of the abstract, as they strike a fresh or freshened eye. That is why this fiction which changes, and is abstract, must give pleasure; it must be always open to discovery by a fresh eye, which is the eye of pleasure, the eye of feeling and imagination, envisaging the "irrational distortion."

> *That's it: the more than rational distortion,*
> *The fiction that results from feeling.*

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In short, an abstract fiction can change and, if the abstraction was soundly conceived, the more it is the same the more it will seem to change, and by the feeling of change in identity, identity in change, give the great pleasure of access of being.

The man-hero is not the exceptional monster,
But he that of repetition is most master.

These are the bare bones of doctrine, and in another poet, most likely of another age, might exactly have been in control of the motion of the poem. In Stevens' poem the doctrine is not in control, nor does he pretend that it is; it is not a system, or even an organization, that he provides us with, but a set of notes brought together and graphed by the convention of his triad. If his notes are united, it is partly by the insight that saw the triad outside the poem, and partly by the sensibility—the clusters of perceptions, and the rotation of his rosary of minor symbols—into which he translates it. There is the great unity and the heroic vision in the offing, and they may indeed loom in the night of the poetry, but in the broad day of it there are only fragments, impressions, and merely associated individuations. Their maximum achieved unity is in their formal circumscription: that they are seen together in the same poem.

Whether a poet could in our time go much further—whether the speculative *imagination* is possible in our stage of belief—cannot be argued; there are no examples; yet it seems more a failure of will than of ability. Certainly Stevens has tackled Socrates' job: the definition of general terms. Certainly, too, he has seen one of the ways in which the poet in whom the philosopher has hibernated, muddled in sleep, can go on with the job: he has seen, in the sensibility, the relations between the abstract, the actual, and the imaginative. But he has been contented or been able only to make all his definitions out of fragments of the actual, seeing the fragments as transformations of the abstract: each one as good, as meaningful, as another, but bound not to each other in career but only to the centre (the major idea) which includes them. That is why, I think, so many of the fragments are unavailable except in passing, and the comprehension of what is passing depends too often upon special knowledge of fashion and gibberish in vocabulary and idiom.

Mr. Stevens himself understands the problem, and has expressed it characteristically in one of the segments of the decade requiring that the Fiction change. It is one of the segments, so common in so many poets of all ages, in which the poet assures himself of the nature and virtue of poetry: the protesting ritual of re-dedication.

The poem goes from the poet's gibberish to
The gibberish of the vulgate and back again . . .
Is there a poem that never reaches words
And one that chaffers the time away? . . .
It is the gibberish of the vulgate that he seeks.
He tries by a peculiar speech to speak

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The peculiar potency of the general,
To compound the imagination's Latin with
The lingua franca et jocundissima.

Granting the poet his own style, it could not be better expressed. Mr. Stevens, like the best of our modern poets, is free master of the fresh and rejoicing tongue of sensibility and fancy and the experience in flush and flux and flower; but he lacks, except for moments, and there, too, resembles his peers, the power of the "received," objective and authoritative imagination, whether of philosophy, religion, myth, or dramatic symbol, which is what he means by the imagination's Latin. The reader should perhaps be reminded that *gibberish* is not a frivolous word in the context; it is a word *manqué* more than a word mocking. One gibbers before a reality too great, when one is appalled with perception, when words fail though meaning persists: which is precisely, as Mr. Eliot suggested in a recent number of the *Partisan Review*, a proper domain of poetry.

One does what one can, and the limits of one's abilities are cut down by the privations of experience and habit, by the absence of what one has not thought of and by the presence of what is thought of too much, by the canalisation and evaporation of the will. What is left is that which one touches again and again, establishing a piety of the imagination with the effrontery of repetition. Mr. Stevens has more left than most, and has handled it with more modulations of touch and more tenacious piety, so that it becomes itself exclusively, inexplicably, fully expressive of its own meaning. Of such things he says:

These are not things transformed
Yet we are shaken by them as if they were.
We reason about them with a later reason.

He knows, too,

The fluctuations of certainty, the change
Of degrees of perception in the scholar's dark,

which it is not hard to say that one knows, but which it is astonishing, always, to see exemplified in images of the seasons, of water-lights, the colours of flowers in the colours of air, or birdsong, for they make so "an abstraction blooded, as a man by thought."

It is all in the garden, perhaps, where the poet's gibberish returns to the gibberish of the vulgate, and where the intensity of the revelations of the single notion of redness dispenses, for a very considerable but by no means single occasion, with the imagination's Latin.

A lasting visage in a lasting bush,
A face of stone in an unending red,
Red-emerald, red-slitted-blue, a face of slate,

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An ancient forehead hung with heavy hair,
The channel slots of rain, the red-rose-red
And weathered and the ruby-water-worn,

The vines around the throat, the shapeless lips,
The frown like serpents basking on the brow,
The spent feeling leaving nothing of itself,

Red-in-red repetitions never going
Away, a little rusty, a little rouged
A little roughened and ruder, a crown

The eye could not escape, a red renown
Blowing itself upon the tedious ear.
An effulgence faded, dull cornelian

Too venerably used. R. P. BLACKMUR

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WAR

A Study of War. By Quincy Wright. The University of Chicago Press. Two Volumes. $15.00.

Mingling all that he could find with everything run into and thought up by writers of "sixty-six studies" over a period of 16 years at The University of Chicago, Professor Wright has succeeded in impressing us with how complicated a professor can make war out to be and how an apparatus of scholarship can use 1,552 pages only to shuttle between cross references as it tries to move out of the library.

The "final results" of this collaborated research are somewhere in these two tomes. Topically, they range over legalistic definitions of war; the "history of war," including animal fighting and duels; the "character of modern civilization"; "fluctuations in the intensity of modern war"; the functions, causes, techniques, and incidences of war; nationalism and foreign policy. They begin with the trilobites and end with the abstractions of "international law." There are great lists of wars and battles and campaigns with notes qualifying their respective inclusions; long irrelevant discussions of "drives, motives, interests, purposes, and intentions"; the "nature of history"; a classification of races. There are 104 tables and charts; there are 24 appendices, composing a total of 411 pages, stuck on the end.

You can find almost anything except a clear conception of what has caused wars, the social compositions and recruitment of armies, the effects of war upon different classes and spheres of given social structures, the relations of the strategies used to the types of armies lghting and the political committees directing them, when and how military strata gain in civilian power and prestige during war, the ways in which armies are financed, and the motivations and ideologies of different sections of an army and of a society at war.

Back of Professor Wright's strabismus lies the error of abstracting

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"war" from the concrete types of social systems which wage wars. The units and epochs in terms of which he generalizes about war are so grand and cloudy that all historical specificity is swallowed; and the generalizations can only be empty in their formality: "Civilizations have been built up by war but have eventually disintegrated through war."

Closely associated with this lack of a manageable classification of societies is the lack of any theory of the internal compositions of social structures. This permits such statements as: ". . . empires have seldom proved economically profitable for the population of the home country." The loose term, "population," hides the problem, which has to do with the correspondence within a society of economic strata and power positions. And the British Empire has stood for several centuries as disproof of the assertion that imperialism will " in the long run" not help capitalism, but will lead to "state socialism and militarism." However, Professor Wright: "States at war have tended to become socialistic and socialistic states have tended to be at war." It is as if Great Britain, at war since the fall of 1936, has become an outpost of socialism and non-capitalist Russia has been plotting world war since 1917.

Economic, political, and psychological spheres are never interwoven into the operations of specific types if society. Because of this it is impossible to see the causes of wars which lie in the diffusion of power within societies. Professor Wright's operative notion of how to find the causes of wars is to search for *all* the conditions which may, after all, influence their occurrence and to quote everybody's opinion, apparently in the conviction that the number of quotations are in proportion to proof. For example, he takes six wars, from the Mohammedan conquests through World War I, and tries to induce from them "the causes of war in general." The conclusion is that, different as they all were, they all undoubtedly had "idealistic, psychological, political, and juridical causes." These "four types of causes of war" may also be classified according to their "relative objectivity, concreteness, and historicity."

The ideological reasons advanced and accepted for war are important indices to those variously interested in the war. Each group may have its own reasons. The consequent ideological competition is part of the political exploitation of the fact of war. This is going on now in terms of "post war plans"; everybody has one, and collectively they legitimate participation in the war on the part of differently placed groups. Professor Wright's confusion of the causes, motives, and ideologies of war is illustrated by a statement in which he is attempting to minimize the economic structure: "That economic factors are relatively unimportant in the causation of war was well understood by Hitler who said: 'One does not die for business, but for ideals.'" Such confusion of ideology and motives with the casual analysis of war obscures the simple fact that what men die for is not always what causes their death.

C. WRIGHT MILLS

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VIRTUOSO OF DECADENCE

Poems. By Stefan George. German-English Edition. Translation by Carol North Valhope and Ernest Morwitz. Pantheon Books. $2.75.

This selection from the works of Stefan George, in the attractive format of the double-text Rilke translations, is the first official homage to the memory of George paid by the remnant of his Circle now resident in America.

Its limitations are sufficiently evident. In the first place it is pretentious. The dust-cover speaks of George, Dante, and Shakespeare, and a translator's note ranks George with Goethe and Nietzsche. Ernest Morwitz's introduction re-affirms the myth of Maximin who is compared not only to Alexander but to Jesus. George, it is insisted, was not only the great poet of the epoch. He "comprised the present and the future"; he was "the judge and propret of his people." And the best that Morwitz can do by way of a rationale of George's philosophy is this: "In Maximin the poet sees the incarnation of sacred youth which, at intervals through the centuries, must be re-embodied in a single form to reunite the scattered forces."

The choice of poems is, moreover, disingenuous. It is too obviously designed not to give offence in a country where neither homoerotism nor fascistic aestheticism are the vogue. Unhappily neither the social function of the George Circle nor the nature of George's genius can be understood without the help of some poems touching on these suspect themes. In any case Morwitz's selection does not pretend to be based on merit alone, and he includes a poem (p. 198) showing that George was not anti-semitic. But he omits an even more striking poem which begins:

Mit den frauen fremder ordnung
Sollt ihr nicht den leib beflecken
Harret! lasset pfau bei affe!

(With the women of an alien order you should not stain your body. Stop! Let peacock mate with ape! [i.e. leave miscegenation to animals]).
And no representative selection from George's work could omit *Der Krieg* which embodies his ambiguous half-pacifist, half-Prussian attitude to the war or *Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren* in which George demands a hero, ominously equipped, with "das voelkische Banner," to whip home the decadent preachers of a false brotherhood, establish a new discipline, and plant a new Reich.

Furthermore, the translations are unsatisfactory. They will please neither those who have no German nor those who read them with the original in mind. Not that they are slipshod. On the contrary. The translators tell us, and we believe them, that they have tried to reproduce the technique of George's verse—rhyme-scheme, even internal rhymes and assonance, alliteration—in English. "The effect achieved by the contrast between light and dark vowels or by a procession of dark or light vowel sounds was maintained. The use of consonants was imitated: sibilant

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or liquid or massed consonants. . . ." All this would be very well if (1) it were possible to imitate and to translate so accurately at the same time and if (2) Morwitz and Valhope had any feeling for the affective values of English words. The sounds and the dictionary meanings they know; but they have disastrously little sense of connotation and association. The result is a mixture of mechanical precision and emotional ineptitude.

When M. and V. come, for example, to *Trauer*, a magnificent poem of pure statement, they reproduce the rhyme-scheme exactly. Each line rhymes with one another, and in every case the translators write one sincere line and one just for the rhyme. In this way the word *reave* is dragged in to rhyme with *weave* where the original is the plain word *brechen* (break). In the same poem *zittern* (tremble) is translated *languish* to rhyme with *anguish*. The need for a rhyme with cracking produces the unthinkable phrase *frosty winds are clacking* for *frostige Winde lachen* (laugh). Add to this that everywhere George's rare and hieratic diction is rendered into the vulgar language of the late Victorians so that (for instance) the recurring rhyme clichés (anguish, languish; lavish, ravish, etc.) recall songbook translations of Lieder.

Nevertheless, Morwitz knows his George, and the translations often help us to interpret obscure passages in the original. This is probably their only use, and indeed the justification of the book is not primarily that it contains translations but that it contains George's original at a time when his work is otherwise unavailable. And, when all is done, George is an excellent poet. Of the 99 poems in the new volume, about a third are among the best written in the twentieth century. Only the best of Rilke and Yeats can match them. George, moreover, is great in a peculiar way. In that he bases his work not upon an accepted system of values but upon a subjective myth, in that he inclines more to nuance than to irony, in that he has more virtuosity than imagination, in that, like Richard Strauss, he prefers splendid orchestration to Mozartian integration, George is the greatest of all decadents. In his mastery and presentation of one small tract of experience, in his superb control over the dialectic of the short poem, he is the greatest of minor poets. If he is also one of the most meretricious of minor prophets, he nonetheless achieves through his prophetic pose the quality which of all moral and aesthetic qualities is most remote from the present age: grandeur. Like the Commandatore in *Don Giovanni* he seems a rather tiresome old man until, transformed into a monument, he becomes master of the situation.

ERIC RUSSELL BENTLEY

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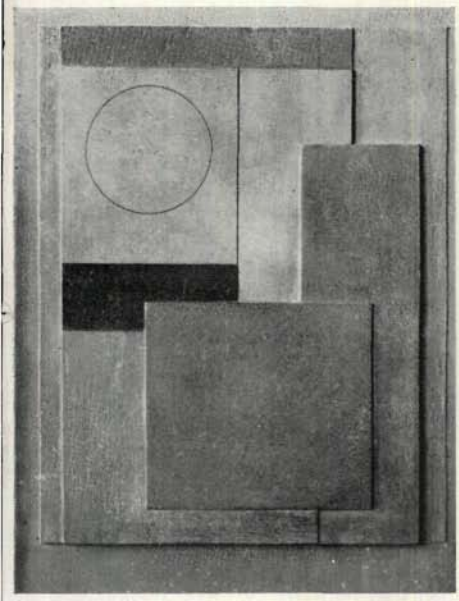

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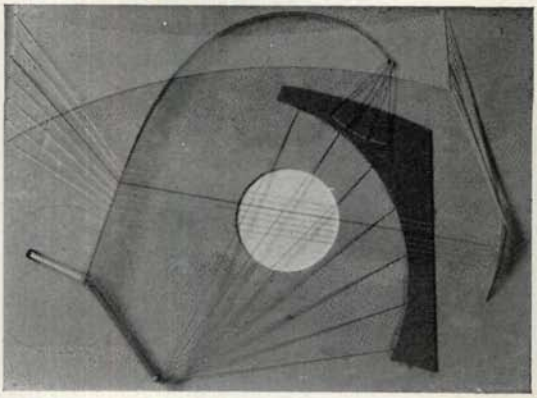

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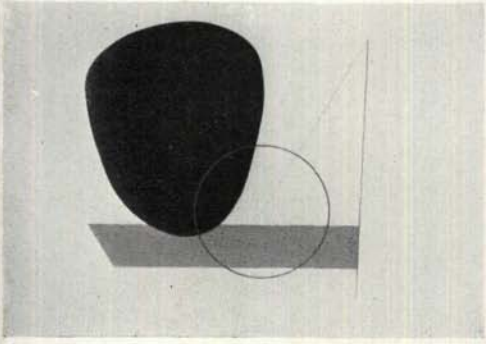

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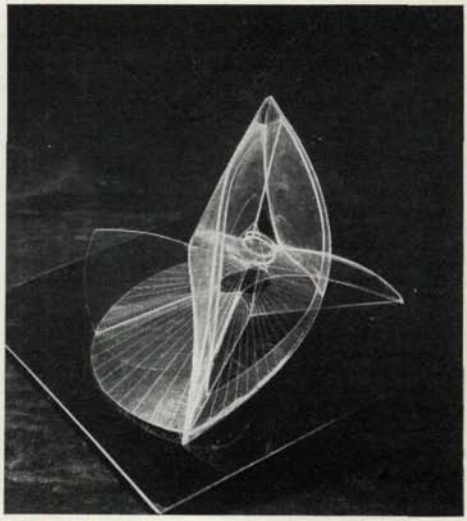

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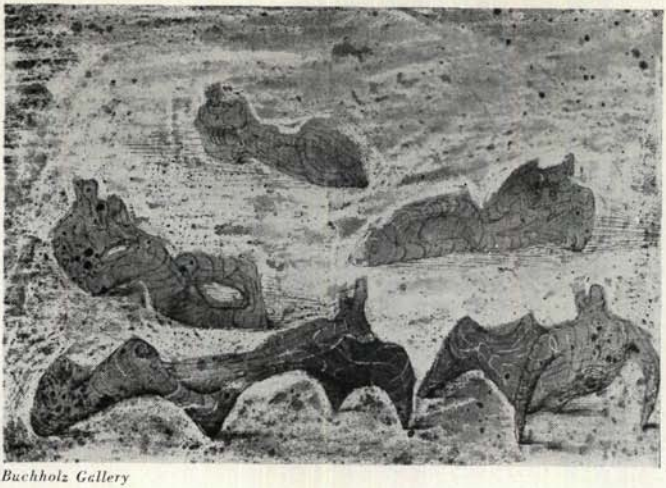

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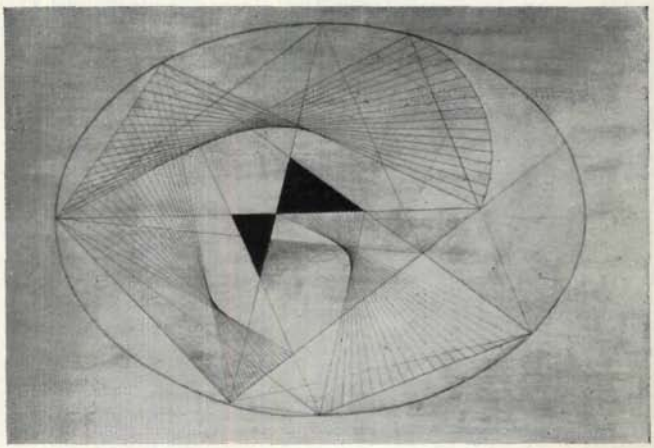

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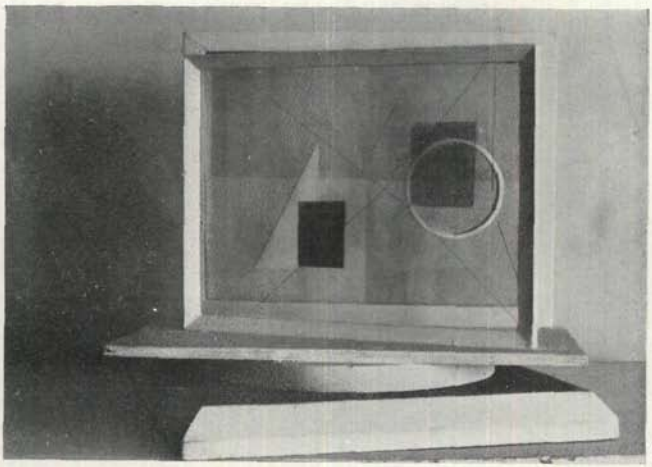

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